2006 Wisconsin Fishing Report

Free

WISCONSIN DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

PUB-FH-506 2006

Let's go fishing!

This report can help guide you to the fishing experience you're after.

Visit these Web pages for more ideas:

www.fishingwisconsin.org

Lake maps: *dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/lakes/lakemap/*

Wisconsin Lakes Book: *dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/lakes/list/#lakebook*

Stocking data: *www.dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/fish/pages/stocking.shtml*

Public fishing areas, stream easements: *dnr.wi.gov/org/land/facilities/dnr_lands_mapping.html.*

Need to borrow tackle?

Rods and reels, hooks and other fishing gear, including for fly fishing, are available from some state parks and DNR offices. Find a list of loaner sites at *www.fishingwisconsin.org* then look under "Kids, Parents, Educators."

Kevin Naze

Need a fishing license?

Here's three quick and convenient ways:
- Call toll free at 1-877-945-4236
- Go online to www.wildlifelicense.com
- Visit any license agent location or DNR service center

2006 Fishing Forecasts*

*..... * Forecasts as of Dec. 15, 2005*

Fabulous fisheries projects

Growing the next world record

Musky hunters are enjoying a sport fishery with true trophy potential in Green Bay and some tributaries due to a DNR program to reintroduce Great Lakes muskellunge. These fish were extirpated in the bay during the mid-1900s by over-fishing, pollution, habitat degradation, and interactions with exotic species. Passage and enforcement of the Clean Water Act starting in the early 1970s, followed by targeted clean up efforts in Green Bay, greatly improved water quality and allowed DNR, with support from local fishing clubs, to start a muskellunge reintroduction effort in 1989. Fertilized muskellunge eggs from Michigan were hatched and raised at the Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery and stocked out at sites including the Fox, Menominee, and Peshtigo rivers, Little Sturgeon and Sturgeon bays, Little Lake Butte des Mortes, Green Bay and the Winnebago system. From 1989 through 2005, 121,330 fingerling and 2,921 yearling muskellunge have been stocked out. Anglers are now reporting catching large fish, and electrofishing and fyke nets surveys have revealed other important information, including that fish stocked as yearlings are about 15 times more effective in surviving and returning as spawners than fish stocked as fingerlings. The surveys also found that Green Bay muskellunge mature up to two years later than muskellunge in some inland Wisconsin lakes but grow faster than muskellunge sampled in eight lakes in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. The muskellunge also achieve a more plump body size at a given length compared to most muskellunge sampled elsewhere throughout their range.

While our stocking efforts have been successful in providing a sport fishery with true trophy potential, we have no evidence that muskellunge are successfully reproducing. We are now trying to broaden the genetic diversity of the fish stocked, developing plans with counterpart agencies in other states to import eggs from other Great Lakes populations. We hope to focus future survey efforts on examining factors that determine spawning success.

–Kevin Kapuscinski, fisheries biologist, Green Bay

The next world record musky may well come out of Green Bay, thanks to a DNR program to reintroduce the Great Lakes strain muskellunge. Kevin Kowalski caught this 45-inch fish in Green Bay. Photo by Jon Regal.

It takes a village…to raise fish

Scores of volunteer groups came together in 2003, 2004 and 2005 to help DNR improve trout habitat along two miles of Gilbert Creek in Dunn County. Dunn County Fish and Game, the Ojibleau, Kiap-TU-wish and Twin Cities Trout Unlimited chapters, Isaak Walton League, Pheasants Forever, Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts, Menomonie Public Schools, UW-Stout and UW-Eau Claire, Elmwood Rod and Gun Club, Rush River/Eau Galle Sportsman Club, City of Menomonie, Boy Scouts, Friends of Trout Unlimited, and "Northwoods Adventures with Dave Carlson" all gave a hand, and in many cases, money.

Volunteers from more than a dozen groups helped DNR trout habitat crews restore habitat on Gilbert Creek in Dunn County in 2003, 2004, and 2005.

During the day, DNR's two-man trout habitat crew – John Sours and Nate Anderson — would use heavy equipment to slope the banks and fortify them with rocks. They'd also place habitat structures in the stream to help narrow, and deepen the channel and establish overhanging cover.

On weekends or during Tuesday work nights, volunteers would help build the habitat structures, help put them in, and do the sodding, seeding and mulching. In all, volunteers poured more than 3,400 hours into the project, and contributed tens of thousands of dollars, some of it through grants. Trout stamp funds paid for $75,000 of the project. "We couldn't do a quarter of what we did on Gilbert Creek without the help of all the groups," says Bob Hujik, fisheries supervisor based in Eau Claire. "Historically, there used to be a few work days, but not like on Gilbert Creek. Ten to 15 different organizations would be helping out on a weekend, and 25-40 guys would come every Tuesday night to help with sodding, seeding and mulching. The work they did is unbelievable."

–Lisa Gaumnitz, public affairs manager, Madison

Web site helps ID fish

A laptop may soon be standard tackle box gear, thanks to a new online fish identification site with 4,000 close ups of 162 species of fish found in Wisconsin and 12 other invasive species possibly on their way. It also describes fish habits and habitats, and provides tricks for telling them apart. The site is the brainchild of John Lyons, a longtime DNR fisheries research scientist, and a spin off from his much larger endeavor to update the seminal reference book, the Fishes of Wisconsin. The site is aimed at helping professional resource managers better identify fish affected by their decision-making, and sharing with citizens Wisconsin's diverse and fascinating array of fish. Funding is largely from federal Sport Fish Restoration and State Wildlife Grant programs, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Limnology and UW-Sea Grant helped create the site. Find it at *www.fishingwisconsin.org*, then select "fish species."

For more projects, see pages 4-6

Dear Wisconsin Angler,

Fisheries Director Mike Staggs shows that even when the Packers are bad, the fishing is good in Wisconsin.

Welcome to Wisconsin – home of the best and most diverse fishing in the country. We offer more waters than dedicated anglers could fish in several lifetimes…an incredible array of fish to catch…and some rare ones just to appreciate.

Fishing is a cornerstone of Wisconsin's culture and economy. Forty-eight percent of adults statewide fish, 60 percent in the Northwoods. We rank second in the country in the number of days nonresidents spend fishing here, and if we had Florida's weather and year-round open water, we'd probably be number one, too.

This 2006 Fishing Report can only hint at the great fishing opportunities awaiting you in Wisconsin. But we hope the forecasts provided by many of our biologists help you understand how your favorite fishing spot is faring, based on the fish surveys and management actions we're taking to make your fishing better.

We hope this report also provides useful information about how we spend your fishing license dollars, and efforts to strengthen our fisheries management program and your fishing.

These advances are very important. While Wisconsin's geologic and glacial good fortune blessed the state with tremendous natural fisheries, the great fishing you enjoy today doesn't happen by accident. It takes Wisconsin's nationally renowned management program and the educational efforts and vigilance of our conservation wardens. It also takes the commitment of DNR staff in other programs and their partners to protect and restore the water quality and habitat your fish depend on. Most importantly, it takes you.

The fishing licenses and stamps you buy, your vocal and financial support of our program, and your time and labor are critical to conserving and enhancing Wisconsin fish populations and fishing opportunities for now and in the future.

So sit back, read up, and then hit the water to enjoy great fishing and the memories of a lifetime.

Sincerely,

Mike Staggs, Fisheries Director

Wisconsin's Reel numbers

162
fish species

15,000
lakes

42,000
river miles

1.4 million
licensed anglers

22 million
annual fishing days

2nd
ranked fishing destination

69 million
fish caught a year

31 million
fish kept a year

$2.3 billion
economic activity

$90 million
in state tax revenues

26,000
jobs

Your investment in good fishing

This information is excerpted from "Wisconsin's Fish & Wildlife Annual Report 2004-2005."

DNR's Fisheries Management and Habitat Protection program and its fisheries research section in 2004-2005 had a combined total of 334 positions and budget of $31.5 million. Of that total, 264 positions and $24.2 million represent traditional fisheries management staff and researchers funded by the Fish and Wildlife Account. The remaining 70 positions – aquatic habitat protection, lake management and wetland staff – are provided through general tax funds, federal funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, water regulation permits and other fees and federal grants.

How does the Fisheries program use your money?

	$ (in millions)
Evaluate fish populations and conduct research	8.2
Rear and stock fish	5.3
Protect and improve habitat	3.6
Inform and educate the public	0.4
Develop rules and regulations	0.5
Pay program operations costs	6.2
Total	$ 24.2

How is fisheries work funded?

Funding Source	$ (in millions)	%
Fish and Wildlife Fund License Fees	15.9	51
Sturgeon license	0.2	<1
Salmon Stamp	1.3	4
Trout Stamp	1.1	4
Sport Fish Restoration	4.7	15
Misc. grants and donations	1.0	3
Subtotal - Fish and Wildlife Account	24.2	77
Rest of the Conservation Fund	1.6	5
General taxes (GPR)	5.7	18
Total	31.5	100

What did the Fisheries program accomplish in 2004–2005?

Conducted scientifically-based fisheries management work.

We monitored fish populations and angler and commercial harvest, set and evaluated harvest regulations and stocking quotas, planned and implemented habitat restoration and improvement projects, and reviewed stocking, fish farm and water regulation permits. We also conducted educational and cooperative activities with the public, and sampled fish populations and habitat quality in **2004-2005** on **822** stream sites and **474** lakes.

Maintained a network of fish biologists and technicians across the state.

We maintain 264 fisheries management positions throughout the state. Ninety-three percent are field positions in local offices or hatcheries where staff work directly with area anglers, groups and communities to improve fishing opportunities.

Improved trout stream habitat.

Using dedicated funds from inland trout stamp revenues supplemented by regular operating funds, in **2004-2005** fisheries staff, often working with partner groups, improved nearly 30 miles of trout habitat, bringing to more than **675** the stream miles improved since the program began in 1979. Each year the $1.1 million raised by the sale of trout stamps and patron licenses is spent to restore and improve 25 to 30 miles of degraded trout streams annually.

Raised and stocked 10,850,000 fish and 20 million fry.

We operated 12 state fish hatcheries and rearing stations, three egg collection weirs, and 10 to 15 fish production ponds. In 2004-2005, we produced up to 5.95 million trout and salmon fingerlings and yearlings, 6.2 million musky, walleye, bass, pike and sturgeon fingerlings, and 20.1 million fry for stocking in about 15 percent of state waters.

Accommodated sport fish harvest and court-mandated tribal fishing rights.

In the 30 northern counties the Chippewa ceded to the U.S. government in 1854, we implemented federally-required monitoring of walleye and musky fish populations, and state and tribal harvest in the ceded territory's 860 walleye and 665 musky lakes. Comprehensive monitoring ensures that fish populations are not overharvested and remain healthy.

In 2004-2005, DNR surveyed fish populations and habitat on 822 stream sites and 474 lakes. Here, fisheries biologist Bradd Sims measures a channel catfish during hoop net surveys from the Pecatonica River.

Monitored Great Lakes fish populations and harvests.

Fisheries staff working in Lake Michigan and Lake Superior operate three large research vessels, set harvest quotas and regulations, set and evaluate stocking quotas, and cooperate with other states and provinces. Sales of the Great Lakes Salmon and Trout stamp provide funds for fish stocking, which is needed to maintain salmon and trout fisheries.

Protected critical habitat and provided fishing access.

Over the years, we've acquired almost 120,000 acres of fishery lands and stream easements. In **2005-2005**, we worked with DNR lands staff to acquire 1,102 acres at $2,914,981 for state public fishery areas. Seven new shore fishing facilities were completed in 2005 and add to the more than 100 other sites built with federal Sport Fish Restoration funding and support from local communities and fishing clubs.

Sampled fish populations for potentially harmful contaminants.

We have documented that the vast majority of waters in Wisconsin have large populations of fish that are very healthy to eat on a regular basis. Each year we publish a fish health advisory for sport caught fish which identifies those waters or species and sizes of fish for which anglers should avoid or limit their fish consumption. In **2004-2005**, we sampled fish from **86** locations in **62** waters.

Trained volunteer instructors and sponsored clinics.

Today's children are tomorrow's anglers and stewards of our aquatic resources. In **2004-2005**, we provided workshops that trained **156** people who introduced more than **7,000** children **and 300 adults** to fishing and aquatic resources. Fisheries staff also sponsored kids fishing clinics and education classes. *Our cooperative summer intern program with the Milwaukee Urban Ecology Center took 244 urban kids on multiple fishing trips in Milwaukee.*

Provided information on fish, aquatic resources, fishing opportunities.

We did this by maintaining comprehensive Web pages on the DNR Web site at *www.fishingwisconsin.org*, which has links to recent news releases, staff directories, searchable fish stocking, fish population and creel survey databases, places to go fishing, lands and access directories, the latest fishing information, and DNR publications and reports. We also published regulation summaries, informational brochures, maps and educational materials and a spring fishing forecast newspaper.

A cast of thousands...

While the fishing licenses and stamps anglers buy pay for traditional fish management staff and activities, other funding sources and the DNR staff they pay for also play important roles in assuring healthy lakes, rivers and fisheries.

Here's a sampling of the work nonlicense funded staff accomplished in 2005 to help make your fishing better:

- Met with thousands of lake and riverfront property owners to advise them how to design, build and locate their shoreline projects to avoid or minimize damaging critical fish habitat.
- Removed, or were slated to remove, 11 old, obsolete dams and restored rivers to a free flowing condition that benefits fish populations and anglers.
- Celebrated the 15th anniversary of a lake grant program by giving out the 1,528th grant and passing the $30 million mark in helping communities with projects ranging from water quality monitoring, to acquiring property and conservation easements, to implementing lake restoration plans.
- Participated in drafting a comprehensive national action plan to restore and protect the Great Lakes over the longterm. The draft strategy provides, for the first time, a single set of national priorities and strategies that Great Lakes officials hope can also be used to secure additional, stable federal funding.
- Funded and administered 43 grants to help local governments and lake associations prevent zebra mussels, Eurasian water-milfoil and other invasive aquatic species from spreading to Wisconsin waters, or to help control already established populations.
- Updated permits for 225 wastewater dischargers to assure their permits incorporated new scientific, technological, and regulatory advances to provide better protection for lakes, rivers and groundwater since the permits were last updated five years earlier.
- Staffed a state task force that has recommended ways that may minimize manure runoff to better protect Wisconsin's water resources, and worked to update administrative rules governing larger livestock facilities to help avoid manure spills and runoff that can cause fish kills and pollute lakes, rivers and drinking water.

Major fisheries initiatives to improve your fishing

Wisconsin's 132-year-old fish management program took steps in 2005, and plans more in coming years, to strengthen fish populations and provide you with better fishing opportunities. Short summaries of a few key advances are provided below; for more information go to *www.fishingwisconsin.org* and look for "2006 Fishing Report."

Renovation of Wisconsin's flagship hatchery gets underway

Paid for entirely with federal Sport Fish Restoration grants, Fox River Natural Resource Damage Assessment funds from paper mills, Salmon Stamp and your fishing and hunting license fees, construction work should begin in fall 2006 on major renovations to the Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery. This deteriorating, turn-of-the-century facility produces trout, salmon, walleye, muskellunge, northern pike and lake sturgeon for statewide stocking. The renovations will enable the hatchery to meet all current environmental regulations and expand production. Without this renovation, stocking of these species would have to be significantly reduced.

Stocking improvements seek to boost survival of stocked muskies

Using the latest genetics science, we have developed an updated muskellunge broodstock management plan to improve the longterm survival of stocked fish, and hence, the efficiency of the hatchery system. We used input from UW-Steven Point geneticist Dr. Brian Sloss and from a technical committee of fisheries biologists, researchers and anglers to develop the plan. One result will be changes starting this spring in the timing of egg collections, the number of fish spawned, egg handling protocols and characteristics of broodstock lakes. Newly initiated studies will examine genetic differences among past and present broodstocks.

Efforts underway to improve lake and brook trout populations

DNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently completed a brook trout restoration plan for Lake Superior and tributaries to improve brook trout populations. Habitat improvement, stocking, regulation changes, and watershed land use planning are already underway. (See page 4) DNR and the Red Cliff and Bad River Chippewa Tribes also completed negotiations on a new 10-year state-tribal fishing agreement. The state and tribes have avoided litigation on Lake Superior fisheries over the years by developing agreements that control commercial and sport fishing for lake trout in Lake Superior. Management efforts have been a major success as lake trout populations have increased dramatically – to the point that they are totally self sustaining in the Apostle Islands area.

Initiatives underway to improve trout fishing in southwestern Wisconsin streams

DNR is cooperating with Trout Unlimited and neighboring states to undertake a regional trout habitat restoration project for the driftless areas of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois. The project, called TU DARE (Driftless Area Restoration Effort), has received significant initial funding from the National Fish Habitat Initiative and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to support staff work among agencies and local governments to restore habitat. The project should benefit the existing DNR trout stamp funded trout habitat improvement program by providing additional funding and technical assistance.

Milestone reached in rebuilding yellow perch fishing in Green Bay

The Natural Resources Board approved a modest increase in the daily sport fishing bag limit from 10 to 15, effective May 20, 2006, and in the commercial quota from 20,000 to 60,000 pounds per year. DNR dropped sport bag and harvest limits in 200l after a 90 percent decrease in yellow perch between 1988 and 2000 because of poor natural reproduction. The limits have offered protections to that 1998 year-class that have enabled those fish to reproduce and help start rebuilding the fish population and fishery. Fall surveys showed that yellow perch numbers in Green Bay continue to rebuild. We saw the largest hatch on record in 2003 and though these fish have not survived as well as previous year classes, adult numbers continue to increase. Also a UW-Madison study of cormorant diets completed this spring shows that while cormorants do eat yellow perch, they are also feeding heavily on gizzard shad, white suckers, and exotic round gobies.

Actions to continue outstanding fishing on Lake Michigan

A strong 2005 chinook salmon harvest by our Wisconsin anglers continued a fourth consecutive year of record-breaking fishing. Hoping to continue the good fishing, and concerned by signs indicating chinook may be outstripping their forage base, Wisconsin and other states surrounding Lake Michigan have agreed to reduce chinook stocking by 25 percent starting in 2006. Wisconsin will reduce its stocking by 21 percent, or by about 300,000 fish, as its share of the total reduction. Michigan will decrease its stocking 30 percent, Illinois 17 percent and Indiana 12 percent. This should ensure that the salmon and trout we stock have ample forage and will survive and help continue the outstanding fishing.

Broadening monitoring for better decision-making

Fisheries crews started monitoring fisheries populations on a broader, more uniform basis to collect baseline data on the health of fisheries and other aquatic communities in lakes, rivers and streams. Previously, DNR's monitoring program focused mainly on high quality or poor quality waters, or those where a fish manager wanted to answer a specific question to help make a management decision. For instance, by sampling lakes during the same time of year, when water's at the same temperature and using the same gear and sampling procedures statewide, DNR will be better able to compare results across waters. We've also identified classes of important waters which will all be sampled periodically to build a comprehensive data set for each water.

As part of a new musky broodstock management plan aimed at increasing survival of stocked musky, DNR hatchery system staff will be changing the timing of egg collections, number of fish spawned, egg handling protocols and characteristics of broodstock lakes. Photo by Heath Benike.

Building a more focused management program for the future

The habitat protection and lake partnership functions that were previously in our integrated Bureau of Fisheries Management and Habitat Protection are being moved to the Watershed Management bureau. Our fisheries program will continue into the 21st century as the Bureau of Fisheries Management with fisheries biologists, technicians, hatchery and operations staff focusing on producing healthy fish populations and great fishing. We'll still be part of DNR's Water Division to maintain the integrated management, but as a separate program. The change means more consistent and efficient delivery and operation of core fisheries management services such as stocking, regulation development and habitat improvement projects.

–Mike Staggs, fisheries director, Madison

Hatcheries working to provide shore fishing opportunities

Since spring 2000, the Kettle Moraine Springs and Lakewood State Fish Hatcheries, in Adell and Lakewood, respectively, have been working hard to provide nearshore fishing for anglers in Lake Michigan. Their crews have raised and sent 243,000 Arlee Rainbow trout through their doors for stocking in harbors in **Kenosha, Milwaukee, Sheboygan, Manitowoc, Algoma and Sister Bay**, with another 66,000 slated to go out this spring. DNR is evaluating this strain to see if the stocked fish will stay in the nearshore areas to challenge anglers who do not have big boat access to the big water.

William Thien of Milwaukee landed this 12-pound Arlee rainbow while fishing off the McKinley Pier in Milwaukee. The fin clip in the fish indicated it had been stocked by DNR in 2001 as part of an experimental program to increase shore fishing opportunities in Lake Michigan. Photo by Jim Smith.

By the time they're stocked, these fish have quite a few miles on them. They get their start as eggs collected and fertilized at the Ennis National Fish Hatchery in Montana before being transferred to Kettle Moraine Springs, where they're hatched and fed for three months before being transferred to Lakewood. There, the rainbows grow from about 2.5 inches to 7.5 inches in the next year and are clipped for future identification by creel clerks before being transported and stocked out by DNR special operations crews.

The work seems to be paying off. An angler fishing from a pier landed a 33-inch, 16.5-pound Arlee that won the steelhead category in the 2005 Port Washington Derby. There have been reports of other fish being caught throughout the 2005 summer in the 12-pound range. Creel surveys have suggested that fully two-thirds of the Arlees are being caught by anglers fishing from shore or small boats. We use your Great Lakes Trout and Salmon Stamp fees to stock and provide you with these new fishing opportunities.

–Jesse Landwehr, Lakewood State Trout Hatchery assistant hatchery foreman

Hatchery system produces 31 million fish for stocking

While DNR studies have shown that about 90 percent of Wisconsin waters have naturally reproducing populations of game fish, about 15 percent are stocked to help provide fishing opportunities. The fish stocked are an amazing array of species, sizes and strains to meet Wisconsin's stocking needs and preserve genetic stocks. We have more than 90 different stocking "products." The accompanying chart shows fish produced in the 2005 fiscal year at 12 fish hatcheries and rearing stations, three egg collection weirs, fish production ponds, and through a cooperative program with local conservation clubs. For more information: *http://www.dnr.wi.gov/org/water/fhp/fish/pages/stocking.shtml*

Fiscal year 2005 fish stocking summary

Fish stocked from July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005

Species	All Ages Total	Small Fingerling	Large Fingerling	Yearling	Adult	Fry
Brook Trout	226,302	78,498	83,300	63,522	982	
Brown Trout	2,300,867	713,529	676,354	787,239	1,845	121,900
Chinook Salmon	1,720,656	1,555,656	165,000			
Coho Salmon	576,286		234,746	341,540		
Lake Sturgeon	23,605	4,497	17,260	1,848		
Lake Trout	159,044		97,601	61,443		
Largemouth Bass	168,225	168,225				
Muskellunge	1,343,109		95,631	678		1,246,800
Northern Pike	3,397,607	139,783	95			3,257,729
Rainbow Trout	757,346	27,144	61,400	666,939	1,863	
Sauger	350		350			
Smallmouth Bass	13,940		13,940			
Splake	133,227		76,062	57,165		
Walleye	20,201,340	4,601,588	52,352			15,547,400
Total Fish Stocked	31,021,904	7,288,920	1,574,091	1,980,374	4,690	20,173,829

Fabulous fisheries projects

Fly fishing gear now on loan

New fly rods are now available for loan to help kids and other novice anglers get a taste of fly fishing in Wisconsin. Theresa Stabo, DNR aquatic resources educator, acquired 105 fly fishing rods at deep discount from Park Falls-based St. Croix Rod and provided the equipment to 12 of DNR's 42 tackle loaner sites statewide. DNR has offered loaner rods and reels, hooks and other fishing equipment for many years, but the cost to buy and maintain fly-fishing gear had been prohibitive until St. Croix Rod provided their generous discount. To find DNR tackle loaner sites, including where fly fishing gear is available, go to www.fishingwisconsin.org and look under "Kids, Parents, Educators" or call (608) 266-2272.

Spearing history comes alive

DNR, the Oshkosh Public Museum, Sturgeon for Tomorrow and other partners are launching a project to document the unique Lake Winnebago lake sturgeon spear fishing season. They're collecting stories, records, copies of old photos and donations of old gear to be used ultimately in production of a book on the fishery's history. The 2006 season marks the 75th consecutive spearing season. Learn more at www.winnebagosturgeon.org or contact Lisa Sharkey, DNR, at winnebagosturgeon@dnr.state.wi.us or (920) 303-5444.

Mabel Bloechl of Oshkosh speared this 91-pound lake sturgeon on opening day of the 1964 Lake Winnebago season. Copies of old photos like this one are among the items sought for a project to record the history of the people who have enjoyed the unique winter spear fishery over the past decades. Photo by Dean Tvedt.

Habitat partnership fuels fantastic walleye fishing

A decade of concentrated efforts by state fish biologists and conservation groups to improve walleye habitat on the Lake Winnebago River system is paying off in shore lunches. 2005 surveys again revealed lots of big walleyes — females averaging 22.4 inches and 4.6 pounds, and males 16.3 inches and 1.6 pounds — and the fourth largest year-class since standardized surveys started in 1986. Survey results in 2004 revealed similarly robust fish and year-classes. "If there is even average survival of these young walleye, they will provide good fishing out to 2012 and beyond," says Kendall Kamke, senior fisheries biologist.

He has no doubt that 2006's wealth of walleye traces directly to projects DNR and sports clubs have been working on since the early 1990s to restore spawning marshes. Drought and an aging walleye population at the time led to poor natural reproduction and record low walleye populations. That triggered the efforts to restore marshes along the Upper Fox and Wolf that weren't receiving flowing water when winter snows melted due to factors like overgrown trees and grasses and earthern dams built on private lands. Most of the restoration work involved reducing the height of the dikes, making spillways in river banks, mowing brush, or installing culverts.

Kamke and other biologists worked with groups such as Shadows on the Wolf, Walleyes for Tomorrow, Otter Street Fishing Club and Sturgeon for Tomorrow to help identify where and what kind of work needed to be done, help guide them through DNR permitting processes often necessary for such work, and conduct fish surveys that can help gauge how the projects are working. Projects on private lands have been funded and the work done primarily by organizations while DNR has focused its limited state fish and wildlife dollars on restoration work on marsh lands the agency has acquired.

–Lisa Gaumnitz, public affairs manager, Madison

Shore anglers gain facilities

Finding a good place to fish can be difficult if you don't own waterfront property or have a boat. We're working to change that. Seven new shore fishing facilities were completed in 2005 to bring to nearly 100 the number built across Wisconsin over the past 20 years, including three in northeastern Wisconsin. These new accessible shore fishing facilities, listed below, were funded in part with federal Sport Fish Restoration funds, and many were done in cooperation with local units of government and other partners.

- **Chippewa County** – Shore fishing walkways on Lake Hallie in the Village of Lake Hallie.
- **Shawano County** - Shore fishing trail along the Wolf River, in Shawano's Sturgeon Park.
- **Washburn County** – Five shore fishing stations on the Yellow River in Spooner, below the dam at the Governor Thompson Fish Hatchery property.
- **Washington County** – Fishing pier on Hasmer Lake, Town of Jackson.
- **Waupaca County** – Shore fishing trail along the Wolf River, near Fremont at the Highway 10 bridge and County Trunk H; a shore fishing trail along the Wolf River in the Mukwa State Wildlife Area.
- **Winnebago County** – Shore fishing decks connected by accessible trail on Fishing Lake in the Winnebago Community Park in Oshkosh.

In addition, fishing piers have been renovated or repaired at Mauthe and Long lakes in the Kettle Moraine State Forest Northern Unit and at the Chippewa River at Brunet Island State Park.

–Cheryl Goodman, fisheries and habitat budget analyst, Madison

Tributaries breathe new life

Four Mile Creek in Bayfield County is among the Lake Superior tributaries to recently undergo a major transition that will benefit Lake Superior basin fishing for decades to come. Fishery crews have been removing tag alder trees, beaver dams and woody debris from headwater reaches to allow years of accumulated sand to pass through, returning historic spawning grounds to the rocky/gravelly character they exhibited more than a century ago.

Because nearly all trout and salmon in Wisconsin's nearshore waters of Lake Superior and tributaries are produced naturally, maintaining and improving habitat in these natural fish hatcheries is essential. We discovered that natural reproduction was poor in many of the upper reaches which had been severely impacted by sand traced back to logging in the late 1800s. Streams "cleaned" of debris and dammed to expedite the passage of logs downstream to the lake for shipment suffered severe erosion and received excessive amounts of sand. Trees such as speckled alder and aspen filled in, trapping the sand and attracting beavers and associated problems with their dams. Brook trout were severly impacted by this degraded habitat. Projects to remove the sand started in 1996, and the results have been dramatic! After one year, for example, an area of Four Mile Creek, Bayfield County, had over 500 salmonid redds or spawning beds in an area that had once been covered with sand. Seventeen tributaries covering 11.7 river miles have been improved to date. This habitat work has the potential to increase natural reproduction and ultimately increase salmonid numbers.

–Bill Blust, fisheries technician, Superior

Fishery management plans chart course for the future

Nearly 450 anglers, lakeshore residents, business owners, fishing guides, and visitors collaborated with fishery managers in the Upper Chippewa Basin on their pilot project to create lake management plans to define the desired future condition of the fishery in 32 lakes and reservoirs throughout the basin. Local lake associations have sponsored 16 Fishery Management Visioning Sessions since 2004 to cover roughly 10 percent of the 311 waters with public access and management potential. DNR staff facilitated these highly interactive sessions in which stakeholders were asked to prioritize fish species of interest and identify for those species the relative importance of numbers versus size, and catch versus harvest. Goals and objectives, sometimes called performance measures, were drafted for five or six species from the consensus of participants in consultation with DNR's fisheries biologists, who served as technical advisors to the groups on what was possible. Participants understood and agreed that the fish managers would select the most appropriate course of action once the goals and objectives were identified and adjusted to incorporate statewide angler preferences and the lake's capability to produce the fishery stakeholders want. The fishery management plans are intentionally considered long-term strategic plans because they set no deadline or schedule for implementation. Each year will bring its own fiscal constraints and work priorities, and local fish managers cannot commit DNR or partner resources to a specific operational schedule for funding and action. Fishery management plans were completed for Butternut Lake and Nelson Lake, with plans expected to be done by July 1, 2006, for the Miller Dam Flowage, Phillips Chain of Lakes, Solberg Lake, Lac Sault Dore and Grassy Lake, Island Chain of Lakes, and the four lower Flambeau River flowages. The tentative schedule for management planning sessions in 2006 includes Potato Lake in Rusk County, the Pike Lake Chain and four flowages on the North Fork Flambeau River in Price County, and four lakes within the Flambeau River State Forest in Sawyer County. Watch local newspapers for the time and location for each session.

– Jeff Scheirer, fisheries biologist, Park Falls

Project improves panfishing

We've placed a priority on improving fish populations for popular species on many lakes in Ashland and Iron counties over the past eight years, including on Pine Lake. Our management actions are paying off with increased panfish angling opportunities and, we hope down the road, improved walleye size structure. In the late 1990s, the walleye-dominated fish community had a severe shortage of prey and was slow-growing. Panfish numbers were extremely low compared to similar waters. To turn this around, we transferred a total of 78,971 adult yellow perch and 17,543 adult bluegill into Pine Lake over a 5-year period to increase the forage base. The fish came from waters with overabundant small panfish, the result of partial winterkills that reduced predator fish species. We also installed 97 log fish cribs, 28 whole tree shelters and 43 shoreline tree drops to enhance hiding cover and spawning habitat. A comprehensive 2005 survey found higher-density, self-sustaining forage fish populations and improved catches of panfish. Daily fyke net capture rates for bluegill increased from less than two fish per net in the mid-1990s to more than 20 in 2005. Recent data also reveal a dramatic increase in yellow perch density in Pine Lake, providing an abundance of prey for walleye. A self-sustaining panfish fishery now exists, and some large bluegill and yellow perch are showing up in the catch. Other waters where we're implementing this strategy are Island Lake, Spider Lake, and Long Lake in Iron County, and Lake Galilee in Ashland County.

–Jeff Roth, fisheries biologist, Mercer

Aeration alleviates winterkill

Good fishing should be available on more than 30 winterkill-prone lakes in northern Wisconsin through cooperative efforts by the Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Forest Service, and local lake groups to install and operate aeration systems during winter.

"Winterkill"—the death of fish due to low oxygen levels during ice-covered periods—is a problem on hundreds of lakes in northern Wisconsin, many of which are small and remote with little public interest. But when winterkill occurs on lakes with public access or private development, DNR can work to address the problem. Some of the more popular northern waters where winter aeration systems now directly help maintain a fishery include Chequamegon Waters Flowage, Mondeaux Flowage, Rib Lake and Kathryn Lake in Taylor County; Blockhouse Lake, Sailor Lake, Riley Lake, and Wilson Flowage in Price County. Often, DNR and the Forest Service buy and install these aeration systems and then work with lake associations to have them take over operating and paying to run them.

–Skip Sommerfeldt, senior fisheries biologist, Park Falls

Preserving unique trout species, expanding fishing

Efforts to provide additional angling opportunities and preserve unique strains of Wisconsin lake trout took a big step forward in 2005. Black Oak strain trout were stocked in October 2005 into the surrounding lakes of Lake Lucerne in Forest County (6,600 fingerlings), Long Lake in Vilas County (5,600 fingerlings), and Big Carr Lake in Oneida County, (1,550 fingerlings.) The Trout Lake strain, which had been stocked into Clear Lake in Oneida County in 2003, was also stocked into its home where very limited natural reproduction has been occurring and periodic stocking is needed to maintain the population.

A few of the recently stocked lake trout may be caught by ice anglers this winter but more will be caught by anglers as the fish reach sexual maturity at 6 to 8 years and 16 to 18 inches long. The lakes with 30 inch size limits will for the most part be catch-and-release fisheries with an occasional lake trout over 30 inches kept as a trophy. Because of the slow growth rates of lake trout, it's important to remember these are long-term projects and we need to be patient waiting for these fisheries to mature. Consult the Wisconsin Trout Fishing Regulations for lake specific restrictions.

–Wes Jahns, fisheries technician, Woodruff

Wes Jahns, DNR technician, holds an adult lake trout during egg taking and tagging operations as part of DNR's effort to preserve unique strains of Wisconsin lake trout and provide additional angling opportunities.

Fabulous fisheries projects

Dredging up good memories

Trout anglers will benefit from a summer 2005 project to dredge Woodboro Springs. DNR dredge operator Jeff Reissmann removed decades of silt and debris to restore valuable trout habitat. Since 1961, fisheries crews based in Antigo have used a retired, retrofitted military amphibious military vehicle to remove the debris and silt of hundreds of years from 50 spring ponds, restoring 164 acres of native brook trout habitat in eight counties, including more than 30 in Langlade County. Spring ponds, usually at the headwaters of trout streams, provide important cold water flow to these streams and spawning and rearing areas for trout, as well as refuge during warm or cold weather conditions. However, many spring ponds have filled in over the course of geologic time and in response to land uses. Dredging can be done on ponds meeting certain criteria, and after receiving the proper DNR permits and environmental review, to prolong the life and productivity of these ponds. The ponds are dredged down to sand, gravel or rock, banks are undercut to provide habitat; existing fallen trees are used for in-water habitat; and spawning sites are flushed of fine sediments to provide for good egg incubation. Inland trout stamp revenues pay for most of the work, complemented by donations from Trout Unlimited chapters. In our opinion, these are the best trout habitat restoration/enhancement projects we could possibly do for the return on the investment of $20,000 to $30,000 for each project. Wisconsin studies have shown that dredged spring ponds won't fill in for centuries, possibly even several millennia. Only days after dredging, the ponds become very clear and many take on an emerald green color. Trout begin using the new home immediately.

–Dave Seibel, fisheries biologist, Antigo, Mike Vogelsang, fisheries supervisor, Woodruff, Pete Segerson, fisheries technician, Antigo

Growin' 'em big

An integrated project to boost panfish and walleye size on four lakes—Black Dan, Island, Winter, and Moose in Sawyer County—is showing results. The project involves stocking extended-growth (6- to 8-inch) walleye fingerlings in the fall in three of the lakes as an extra predator for panfish control. Small panfish are removed by spring fyke netting from two lakes and then stocked into Moose Lake, where natural panfish recruitment is poor. Predators are protected by special regulations including a 14-18 inch protected length range for walleye on Lake Winter, and a 28-inch minimum length limit on Black Dan and Island lakes. The program has been in place four years and we've achieved our objective for improving panfish populations so that 25 percent of bluegills exceed 6 inches on three of the lakes. Our spring 2005 population estimate for walleye in Lake Winter found low densities but an average length of 22 inches. This project will continue for two more years with financial support from the Winter Lakes Alliance and the Moose Lake Improvement Association.

–Frank Pratt, senior fisheries biologist, Hayward

Dam operation changes a boon to fish, anglers

Once every 50 years, DNR biologists have the opportunity to comment on federal re-licensing of hydroelectric dams. Negotiations with Excel Energy regarding the Tainter Lake Dam in Dunn County produced changes that will benefit fish, anglers and other recreational users as well as local energy users. During fall 2005, the utility replaced flashboards with a more effective rubber bladder dam to avoid the flashboards washing out during large floods, causing the lake level to drop 5 feet before the flashboards could be replaced. This often happened during peak spawning periods for panfish and bass. We're optimistic that fishing will no longer be interrupted by fluctuating water levels and that sport fish populations will benefit from stable water levels beginning in 2006. We also believe that Excel's agreement to operate the dam to allow more natural flows in the Red Cedar River wll significantly improve aquatic habitat for many endangered and threatened fish and wildlife species located in Lower Chippewa River State Natural Area as well as recreation for local tubers, canoeists, paddlers and owners of small motor boats. That dam owners made these improvements while preserving the capacity ratings of the hydroplants is good for the environment and good news for local energy users.

–Heath Benike, fisheries biologist, Barron

Mississippi River projects to boost fish, waterfowl habitat

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota DNRs in 2005 completed major work on three separate multi-million dollar habitat restoration projects on the Mississippi River. Locks and dams built on the Upper Mississippi 70 years ago to regulate water levels for barge traffic have changed the river's mosaic of habitats, fish and wildlife populations, including eroding away barrier islands that had previously sheltered backwater habitats critical for fish during the winter, and for waterfowl and other wildlife at other times of the year. All three projects involve rebuilding islands, with two in Pool 5, downstream from Alma, Wis., and the third on Mud Lake on the Iowa side near Dubuque.

Also in 2005, the partners conducted a drawdown in Pool 5 aimed at promoting aquatic plant growth by lowering water levels 1.5 feet during the growing season. These projects required a tremendous amount of effort, teamwork, coordination and resources and their cumulative benefits are the first steps toward restoring these sections of the Mississippi River to their former glory. The hope is that the combination of the drawdown and island-building will lead to excellent year around fishing within a handful of years, along with more abundant and diverse wildlife for hunters and wildlife watchers beginning in fall 2005.

–Jeff Janvrin, Mississippi River habitat specialist, La Crosse

Culvert project a success

Good things are happening on McCann Creek. DNR worked with private landowners and Trout Unlimited to replace and lower three culverts which were raising water temperatures and proving barriers to fish movement. The work is expected to benefit brook trout in particular. They are the most sensitive trout species, and higher water temperatures can impact them at all life stages and particularly during spawning. Unrelated to that project, a 2005 survey done at multiple sites on the McCann provided a comparison of trout status from 1996. It found that the density of trout decreased from 1996 to 2005 but the average weights of fish and size structure for larger fish have improved. Trout 8 inches and larger comprised 17 percent of fish caught, up from 8 percent in the 1996 survey.

–Joe Kurz, fisheries biologist, Chippewa Falls

Petenwell Flowage starting to feel like home for sturgeon

In 2005 we continued efforts to re-establish a self-sustaining population of lake sturgeon throughout the Wisconsin River, a longterm project given that females mature at 20 to 25 years and then spawn only once every three to five years. The last remaining sizable population of Wisconsin River Lake Sturgeon lives in Lake Wisconsin and makes an upstream spawning run in the spring and concentrates below the Wisconsin Dells Dam, where we annually electrofish for spawning sturgeon. We give the females a hormone injection to induce spawning and hold them in a tank with male sturgeon. After spawning, the adult sturgeon are released and the fertilized eggs are taken to the Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery, where they're hatched and the young sturgeon raised to fingerling stage. By fall, the fingerlings are tagged and distributed in the Wisconsin River system from the Brokaw Flowage downstream to the Stevens Point Flowage. Tag returns have indicated that at least some of the young sturgeon have moved downstream through several dams and now make the Petenwell Flowage their home. Juvenile lake sturgeon are now being caught by anglers on the flowage. Anglers are reminded that the sturgeon fishing season is closed on the Wisconsin River above the Wisconsin Dells Dam. Hopefully the day will come when lake sturgeon are again cruising throughout the Wisconsin River to the point where the population can support an open fishing season.

–Scot Ironside, fisheries biologist, Friendship

Efforts launched to jumpstart Pecatonica River smallie fishery

A five-year plan to restore the smallmouth bass fishery on Otter Creek got started in May 2005 with the stocking of fish paid for with funds from a court settlement involving two manure spills into the creek. Part of a settlement between Reichling Homestead Farms, Darlington, and the state Department of Justice, for violating Wisconsin's water pollution control laws provides $12,628 in Fish Restoration Costs to DNR. DNR is using the money to re-establish a smallmouth bass population in Otter Creek. The creek was one of the best smallmouth fisheries in southwestern Wisconsin until multiple fish kills between 1988 and 2001 reduced smallmouth bass abundance, and two manure spills from the Reichling farm into the creek in 2004 exterminated the remaining smallmouth bass and killed fish in the Pecatonica River. The recovery plan centers on fish stocking and monitoring over the next five years. Last May, DNR fisheries personnel transferred 49 adult males, 24 adult females and 82 yearlings from the Galena River in Lafayette County to Otter Creek, and more adult fish may be transferred in 2007 and 2009 to establish an immediate adult population and facilitate natural reproduction. In addition, 2,667 fingerlings were stocked in 2005 from Gollon Bait and Fish Farm, Dodgeville, and such stockings will occur annually for the next four years. Surveys will be conducted to monitor multiple year class strength, stocking success and natural reproduction of smallmouth bass in 2006, 2008 and 2010.

–Bradd Sims, fisheries biologist, Dodgeville

Reports reveal Upper Mississippi riches, challenges

Three reports now available to the public document the diversity and status of the fish and aquatic plant communities, and the water quality challenges and improvements, along a 840-mile stretch of North America's largest river. The reports feature monitoring data on the Upper Mississippi River collected from the early 1990s through 2002 by DNR's Onalaska-based Longterm Resource Monitoring Field Station staff and partnering agencies from the federal government and other states. The reports provide DNR fish managers and other resource managers information to help make them decisions about managing fisheries and other natural resources. The field stations also finished a second year of collecting data as part of a multi-state and agency effort aimed at assessing the river's condition and working with the EPA to issue a "report card" on its health. To find the three reports, go online to *www.umesc.usgs.gov/ltrmp.html*, click on "report listing" and look for 2005 reports with "multiyear" in their titles.

–Terry Dukerschein, fisheries supervisor, Onalaska

Stocking a wild success

Preliminary results from 2005 fish surveys show that initiatives to stock wild strain brown trout into the Eau Galle and Willow rivers are working. Progeny from wild strain brown trout were introduced into the rivers in 2003. Brown trout densities, once under 300 per mile, now are reaching modest densities (1,500 to 2,500 per mile) with a surprising number of heavy 15- to 20-inch fish present. In addition, changes in dam operation at the Spring Valley Dam negotiated with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have resulted in improved temperatures for trout survival. In-stream habitat improvement to restore channelized sections of the Eau Galle River in the Village of Spring Valley is nearly complete.

–Marty Engel, fisheries biologist, Baldwin

Passageway eases fish movement on Rock River

A fish passage structure installed at the Jefferson Dam in Jefferson in November 2005 will allow game and non-game fish to reach upstream and downstream waters for the first time in decades. The passage will provide uninterrupted river access for 40 miles, improving the movement, reproduction and recruitment of fish species such as sauger and walleye. The series of horizontally elongated steps filled with rock provide a gentle slope that reduces water velocity so fish are able to swim upstream. Pools and eddies are also included to provide resting spots for fish as they travel upstream. Water flowing over the dam and down the ladder stimulates fish to continue to pass up and over each step.

Funding for the fish passage came primarily through federal grants from the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. DNR's Environmental Damage Compensation account, and funds from fishing licenses also were used.

DNR fisheries biologists are researching how fish move through the new fish passage and within the Rock River system as a whole, and ask that any anglers catching fish with a fluorescent pink tag to report it to the address on the tag or (920) 387-7876. Anglers are asked to **not** remove tags from fish they release.

–Laura Stremick-Thompson, fisheries biologist, Horicon

Fabulous fisheries projects

River gets TLC

Starting this spring, fish crews, working with eight partner groups, will restore one-quarter mile of stream channel along the East Branch of the Pecatonica River south of Barneveld in Iowa County. The project calls for removing trees from the stream corridor and about 37,000 yards of soil in the valley bottom that has accumulated from years of uphill erosion. The stream bank will be sloped so it can reconnect with its floodplain.

Other project goals include creating suitable conditions for a balanced cool water fish community, improving habitat for rare species such as the Blanchard's cricket frog and Blanding's turtle, establishing grassland bird habitat by removing trees and converting agricultural field to wet prairie, and improving water quality by allowing the stream to spill over its banks more often. Funding will be provided through a State Wildlife Action grant and a State River Management grant. Project partners include The Nature Conservancy, Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, The Prairie Enthusiasts, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, UW-Madison Center for Limnology, Wisconsin Waterfowl Association and UW Extension.

–Greg Matthews, public affairs manager, Fitchburg

Trout heaven on the Tomorrow

Anglers on the Tomorrow River will notice a lot in the way of habitat improvement and before long, considerably more trout, after completion of two projects in 2005. North of Nelsonville, habitat crews installed nearly 850 feet of overhead structures and strategically placed boulder retards and full logs on the river on the Richard Hemp Fishery Area. They also cleaned and restored flow in eight spring entrances. Recent surveys on an earlier habitat improvement project in this part of the river indicated about 400 brook trout and 1,200 brown trout per mile. We hope for similar numbers in this new reach once it stabilizes. A second reach below Amherst had 2,200 feet of habitat constructed, including the creation of 10 wing walls using in-stream materials, installation of 16 lunker structures and eight skyhook covers, placement of 180 boulder retards, and digging two sediment traps. This project decreased the average stream width from 63 feet to 43 feet and more than doubled the average depth. We recently stocked 30,000 fingerling brown trout from wild stock into the lower Tomorrow River and will track them via fin clips. The new habitat created in 2005 and a section completed at the Waupaca County line in 2003 should give the stocked and resident fish plenty of hiding places and hopefully enhance the population for the future.

–Tom Meronek, fisheries biologist, Wausau

Oconomowoc River transformed

In fall 2004, fish in the Oconomowoc River between the City of Oconomowoc, and North Shore Drive in the Town of Ixonia, Jefferson County, were poisoned to eliminate the carp-dominated population existing in that 7-mile stretch of river. Since then, thousands of native game fish, panfish and forage fish have been stocked to establish a quality fishery. Walleyes, largemouth and smallmouth bass, northern pike, bluegills, rockbass, perch, and many non-game fish such as suckers, minnows, darters and shiners were stocked, some from state hatcheries, others from upstream lakes and other parts of the Oconomowoc River. Still others were salvaged from the river before it was treated. The result, so far, is a highly diverse fish population that is no longer dominated by carp and already boasts "keeper-sized" bass, northerns and panfish. DNR biologists are seeing the return of plant beds once uprooted by the carp but needed to hold sediment in place and provide habitat and food for minnows and young fish. Some small carp have already returned to the river from upstream lakes, but an electrical fish barrier keeps larger carp from migrating into the Oconomowoc River from the Rock River. We hope the healthy fish community developing in the rehabilitated Oconomowoc River will control carp by preying on these smaller carp and competing with them for food. Additional stocking of game fish and panfish is planned in the coming years.

–Susan Beyler, senior fisheries biologist, Waukesha

Babbling brook, trout return

The 15-foot wide, seven-foot high Genesee Roller Mill Dam and a 480-foot earthen embankment were removed in early 2005 from the Genesee Creek in Waukesha County. DNR fisheries staff had been interested in buying this dam for many years and stayed in contact with the owner, an ardent trout angler and conservationist. When he decided to sell his Waukesha County land holdings, including the dam, DNR was able to buy and remove the dam, restore in-stream habitat for naturally reproducing brook and brown trout, and restore native wetland and streamside habitat. Habitat for trout-preying northern pike is gone, as is the shallow, silt-laden flowage. In its place is a rapidly flowing, babbling brook, its banks lined by natural field stone. Lots of wild brown trout took up immediate residence. Now, DNR fisheries and watershed management staff will be watching the new finny residents to see if they reproduce, expand their numbers, and, perhaps, see if the wild brook trout that are still hanging-on further upstream decide to return to their former digs. Carroll College, Trout Unlimited, and the Wisconsin Wetlands Association worked with DNR to remove the dam and to raise the money for removal and restoration costs.

–Randy Schumacher, fisheries supervisor, Waukesha

Fostering fishing fun

In 2005, more than 6,000 kids in southeastern Wisconsin learned basic fishing skills and gained insight into aquatic ecology through more than 50 clinics and events using Urban Fishing Program rods, equipment, and personnel. The program is part of DNR's statewide Angler Education Program to provide training and materials to volunteers who offer fishing clinics to the public, particularly youth groups and organizations. The Urban Fishing Program, based in Milwaukee, works to provide and improve angling opportunities for urban youth, the elderly, and people with limited access to recreational fishing. In addition to clinics and events, the Urban Fishing Program teams up with municipalities to offer urban fishing lagoons and provide loaner equipment and instruction. The 50 urban fishing lagoons are stocked, accessible to the public and open year-round for fishing, with a special season from mid-March to the end of April that's open only to anglers ages 15 and under and those possessing a resident disabled angler fishing license. Rods, reels, and other related equipment are available on a first-come, first-serve basis at several loaner sites in the area. Casting games, complete with plastic fish targets and casting plugs, offer kids dry-land casting practice before they hit the water. To request equipment or assistance in setting up a clinic, contact Mark Baldock at (414) 333-1183. In 2006, we'll be launching new Web pages to provide the locations of Urban Fishing Lagoons, contact information, fishing facts, and updated events. It will also list our program's goals and initiatives, success stories and photos from fishing clinics. Look for F.U.N. – Fishing Urban Neighborhoods coming soon on DNR's Web site. - *Mark Baldock, Urban Fishing Program coordinator, Milwaukee*

Bass, pike making a comeback in Lake Michigan harbors

A two-year study ending in 2005 documents good shorefishing opportunities for smallmouth bass in Lake Michigan harbors, indicating the progress made in improving water quality and the impact of catch-and-release practice. Populations of smallmouth bass, a fish intolerant of poor water quality, have substantially increased, researchers believe, due to improvements in the habitat quality of Lake Michigan tributary streams, especially in the lower reaches. Dam removals, in some cases, and the remnants of heavy smallie stocking in the late 1980s have played a role as well. Our study of Lake Michigan harbors found that the **Kenosha harbor** contained a wide variety of panfish, dominated by rock bass followed by bluegill and largemouth bass. Rock bass and largemouth bass were found in a wide range of sizes, which suggests healthy populations, and only a few smallmouth bass were captured. **Racine harbor** had significant numbers of smallmouth; although few were over 14 inches (legal size), nearly 65 percent were over 10 inches. **The Milwaukee River and harbor** are the most heavily fished nearshore areas for smallmouth bass, and we documented a wide distribution of smallies throughout. The majority of fish are 8 to 12 inches while larger fish are always a possibility, and there is a small percentage of harvest on these fish. More and more anglers are heading to the water with a catch and release attitude, which will promote a fishery for larger smallmouth bass in the future. Although the **Port Washington harbor** produced a limited number of smallmouth bass in our survey, anglers are still successfully targeting them, primarily in summer. The **Sheboygan River and harbor** had the greatest density of smallmouth bass, and bass from age 1 through 8 were represented in the sample, with 2- and 3-year-olds the most dominant year-classes. In addition, northern pike also occurred in significant numbers to provide good nearshore fishing opportunities. - *Pradeep Hirethota, Lake Michigan fisheries biologist; Jeff Zinuticz, Lake Michigan fisheries technician, Milwaukee*

Dam removals, habitat projects rejuvenate Milwaukee River

A focus on restoring, enhancing and protecting habitat is producing diverse, much improved fishing in the Milwaukee River Basin where 16 percent of the state's population lives on 1 percent of its land. The removal of 10 obsolete dams from the Milwaukee River and its tributaries since 1987, combined with other private and public habitat and water quality efforts, have transformed these areas from shallow, silt-laden ponds with few fish into popular fishing destinations with diverse, abundant fish. For example, a 1996-2001 study documented an increase from seven to 37 the total number of fish species captured in the stretch formerly impounded by the North Avenue Dam, including lake sturgeon and walleye, the subjects of ongoing restoration projects. Recently completed and planned future work will further benefit the fisheries. DNR worked with local units of government and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District to remove more than two miles of concrete-lined stream channel from the Lincoln Creek tributary in Milwaukee County as part of a $100 million flood control project. Another 300 feet of stream on Pigeon Creek, another valuable Milwaukee River tributary in Thiensville, is proposed to be taken out of an underground tunnel and opened-up to sunlight, fish and fishing, and there's a possibility a dam on the creek may be removed to allow fish spawning access from the Milwaukee River and Lake Michigan. In cooperation with Mequon, we restored 60 acres of wetland on a former muck farm and 2,000 feet of stream channel along Trinity Creek, a tributary of the Milwaukee River in Ozaukee County. The new stream channel, wetlands and ponds aim to provide northern pike spawning habitat. In rural portions of the basin, our management actions, combined with improved farming practices, have improved water quality and stream habitat so much that the number of classified trout stream miles in the basin may climb from 25 to as much as 50 miles!

–Will Wawrzyn, fisheries biologist, Milwaukee

Improving water quality and the removal of 10 old, obsolete dams from the Milwaukee River or its tributaries have fostered the renaissance of this once polluted urban river as an angling hotspot.

Fish C.S.I. on the move

DNR's fish health program investigates the causes of fish kills and monitors the health of fish at state fish hatcheries and spawning weirs. The program's laboratory move in November 2005 consolidates work sites and allows for more responsive and timely results. The fish health laboratory is now at the Science Operations Center, which also houses DNR's research scientists, wildlife health biologists, air management staff, and library. Previously program staff worked out of two separate labs and shared space with the wildlife health program. In the new facility, fish and wildlife health have separate labs and share a large multi-purpose lab for conducting necropsies, making X-rays and analyzing tissues. Having all these facilities in one place saves time and makes it easier to coordinate fish health field and lab operations.

–Susan Marcquenski, fish health specialist, Madison

Got habitat? Bass Lake does

During 2005, the Bass Lake Association built submerged fish cribs that were installed with our help. Small pine trees were also dropped into the lake with the aid of DNR to help provide more fish habitat. DNR received necessary permits in 2005 for the placement of a walleye spawning reef along the shore of National Forest Land in Bass Lake. The U.S. Forest Service has approved the project. We believe the reef will be built over the ice in 2006. The funding sources for the reef project are DNR, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bass Lake Association.

–Justine Hasz, senior fisheries biologist, Peshtigo

2006 Regional Forecasts

For more detailed forecasts, go to www.fishingwisconsin.org

Northern Region

Langlade County

Trout habitat restoration and enhancement projects completed last summer included the Antigo crew's dredging of Woodboro Springs in Oneida County (see story page 5) and stream habitat work on a section of Spring Brook near Antigo. We anticipate tremendous positive response by the trout populations to these projects, which reflect your trout stamp dollars at work, as well as the cooperation and generous support of the Antigo and Northwoods Trout Unlimited chapters.

McGee Lake will be treated next October to eliminate the unwanted largemouth bass, which were illegally introduced into the lake. Before treatment, we will capture as many brook trout as possible, spawn them and rear the young for restocking the lake after treatment to repopulate the lake through natural reproduction. Anglers are encouraged to harvest all bass up to their daily limit, five. Most of the bass are 7 to 12 inches, but go up to 19 inches.

A Wolf River trout study finishing this summer will provide some very good information to help us better manage the Wolf River system for trout. Last spring we tagged 1,800 brown trout 7- to 10-inches (15 percent of the 11,500 stocked). We continue to encourage anglers to report all tagged fish caught to the Antigo DNR Service Center (715) 623-4190). We are also summarizing the telemetry information from radio transmitters implanted in 23 brown trout in 2004. The Wolf River Chapter of Trout Unlimited contributed money toward the airplane time it took to do the telemetry…thank you! Anglers who catch any fish that has a wire antenna sticking out of the belly are asked to return it to the address on the side of the radio tag so we can reuse it. Thank you!

In 2005, we completed lake surveys on Enterprise, Mary, Moccasin, and Otter lakes. Enterprise remains a top destination for walleye and muskellunge, and also has some nice smallmouth bass. Mary is good for largemouth bass and panfish. Moccasin is a good largemouth bass and muskellunge fishery. There were only about 75 walleye in Moccasin Lake, but if you are lucky enough to catch one, chances are it is a fish over 20 inches. Otter has good walleye, largemouth bass, and perch populations.

In fall seven lakes were electrofished to evaluate walleye stocking success and natural walleye reproduction. In 2005, natural reproduction of walleye in Enterprise Lake was good while Otter Lake had a low level of naturally reproduced walleye and just one naturally reproduced walleye was found in Upper Post Lake. No natural walleye reproduction was found in Moccasin, Rolling Stone, Summit, and White lakes last year.

Last year, brook trout surveys on a section of the East Branch of the Eau Claire River were up 5 percent over the long-term average from 1986-2005. Population estimates showed there were almost 3,200 brook trout 4-inch and larger per mile in this section of stream, down about 100 fish per mile from 2004. We see fluctuations in trout numbers from year to year likely in response to environmental conditions (drought, warmer than average summer temperatures, colder than average winter temperatures, etc.).

Last spring we completed trout surveys on Garski, Krause, McGee, Rabe, Saul, and Shadick springs. With the exception of McGee, all of these spring ponds held nice numbers and sizes of trout.

–Dave Seibel, fisheries biologist, Antigo

Lincoln County

A 2005 fish survey on the Spirit River Flowage revealed a good walleye population, an abundant northern pike population, and a low density but high-size quality muskellunge population. We estimated the walleye population at 2.9 adult fish per acre, average for northern Wisconsin's naturally reproducing walleye lakes. Northern pike were numerous, but most were on the small side at less than 20 inches. They should provide excellent ice fishing in coming years. We also netted some 45+ inch muskellunge. As with most flowages, panfish densities are low but the size quality is high.

Fall electrofishing surveys on six lakes and impoundments where we are evaluating walleye stocking success and natural walleye reproduction revealed good natural reproduction of walleye in the Spirit River Flowage. We didn't find any walleye reproduction in Tug Lake from 2005, but we found several 1.5 year-old walleye. No natural walleye reproduction was found in Halfmoon, Pesabic, Seven Island, and Somo lakes last year.

Stream habitat improvement work last summer on a section of the Prairie River upstream from Prairie Forks Drive involved channel shaping a one-third mile stretch and placing boulders in the stream for fish habitat. The Wisconsin Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Friends of the Prairie River group assist with these habitat projects through funds to purchase boulders and excavator hours, and also by lining up access easements with private landowners.

Last summer, trout numbers in the Prairie River climbed 26 percent in one survey and 9 percent in another. A third survey station showed a 13 percent decline. These three stations averaged 2,100 trout per mile, which is 9 percent above the 2004 estimates but still 35 percent below the long-term average. 2005 was the second year in a row of increased trout numbers in the Prairie River, a trend also seen in other area trout streams. Size structure of trout in the Prairie River remains good, with brook trout over 15 inches and browns over 21 inches captured in our surveys.

–Dave Seibel, fisheries biologist, Antigo

Sawyer County

Our pilot project for lake management planning continued in 2005. Public input sets management goals and objectives, allowing the manager to prescribe strategies to achieve those outputs. So far, Nelson Lake has a completed plan which is already in the implementation stage. The key item is a major initiative to rehabilitate the walleye population via stocking of extended-growth (6- to 8-inch) fingerlings. About 12,000 large fingerlings were stocked in 2005 as part of a joint effort between DNR, the Nelson Lake Association, Walleyes for Northwest Wisconsin, and the Red Cliff Tribe. New regulations for bass and northern pike that are consistent with the new management plan goals have been proposed for public consideration at the 2006 Spring Hearing of the Conservation Congress.

Public input sessions were held for Lac Courte Oreilles, Grindstone Lake, the Chippewa Flowage, and Round Lake in the summer of 2005. Goals and objectives were developed. Management plan strategies are currently being formulated for these waters. In 2006, this process will be used to begin developing management plans for "The Quiet Lakes," Moose Lake, Spider Lake, and the Tiger Cat Flowage.

Walleye: Populations are stable or increasing in most waters. Best bets are Teal Lake, the Chippewa Flowage, Grindstone Lake, and even Round Lake. The 14 to18 inch slot limit at Grindstone has contributed to an excellent size structure in that population. Walleye populations are in trouble on some lakes, such as Nelson and Smith, due to decreased reproduction, lack of small fingerling survival, and competition/predation from largemouth bass and perhaps crappie. The rehabilitation program in Sand Lake appears to be on track for complete recovery in 2007-2008.

Bass: Bass fishing and populations have never been better in most waters, at least not since walleye became established in most area lakes in the late 1950s. Sawyer County is split by the early/late season line. Because bass populations have increased in both zones, we believe size limits and voluntary release (not the later opener) have been responsible for the changes. Currently there are almost too many great bass waters in Sawyer County to list, but some of the best for smallmouth are Round, Grindstone, Lac Courte Oreilles, Chippewa Flowage (east basin), and all forks and branches of the Flambeau and Chippewa rivers. For largemouth bass - Spider chain, Tiger Cat chain, Mud/Callahan; Chippewa Flowage (west basin); Smith and Nelson lakes, Totogatic Flowage, and Lake Hayward.

Panfish: Good fishing for bluegills greater than 8 inches and crappies greater than10 inches will be found mostly in waters with restrictive bag limits like Nelson, Chetac, Sissabagama, Sand, Moose, and Christner. The Chippewa Flowage (mostly west basin, but some east) has become a major producer of bluegills over the past few years. This surprising but welcome development may be the result of more stable water levels and plant growth in recent years.

Muskellunge: Really big muskellunge are and always have been rare, though "sub-trophy" fish in the 40 to 50 inch range are increasing in many county waters. The best bets for trophy muskellunge in Sawyer County are the Chippewa Flowage, Lac Courte Oreilles, Grindstone, Round, and a handful of smaller, sleeper lakes. Good action lakes where trophy size is less likely due to higher numbers include Lost Land and Teal, Winter, Moose, Sand, Spider, and Big Sissabagama. Pure action lakes with abundant but small fish include the Tiger Cat chain and Mud/Callahan lakes (great places to take a kid fishing). Habitat protection and management of harvest are the most effective tools available for managing muskellunge. The importance of stocking, regardless of strain, appears to be waning except in waters where predation from increasing numbers of northern pike and/or largemouth bass may limit the survival of young muskies.

Trout: Stocked brown trout have grown fast to sizes up to 24 inches in Big Round Lake, but low interest toward brown trout at the summer 2005 public visioning session will spell an end to active brown trout management there. Lakes like Perch, Camp Smith, and Ashegon remain good put-grow-take trout fisheries. The smaller lakes are now stocked more cost-effectively with entirely wild strain spring fingerlings (stocked a year before they are big enough to catch). Ashegon Lake is one of the most diverse two-story fisheries around, with good fishing for largemouth bass, walleye, northern pike, five different species of trout, and an occasional big panfish as well. It also hosts cisco and is reputed to have a few, very large muskellunge. A study of the genetic background of wild brook trout in the Namekagon River drainage is in its first of four years. The stream stocking program for the Couderay River, Weirgor Creek, and Namekagon River below Hayward has been shifted over to 100 percent wild strain (Timber Coulee) spring fingerling brown trout. This strain outperformed domesticated hatchery strains by a wide margin in these study waters. Wild brook trout are definitely on the increase in the upper Namekagon following the Shultz Springs restoration project in 2003-2004. The Phipps reach shows signs of now supporting some of its best wild trophy brown trout since 1983, despite some summer-kill in the hot summer of 2005.

Northern Pike: Nelson Lake remains a good bet for large northern pike. Their role in this ecosystem as the ecological equivalent of muskellunge (very rare in Nelson Lake) was strongly endorsed by the 41 participants in our 2004 fishery visioning session. Consistent with the resulting plan, a 32-inch minimum length limit for Nelson Lake pike will appear as a question at the 2006 spring rules hearing. Two other good bets for northern pike in Sawyer County include Grindstone Lake (very large fish, but

In reel terms

Every profession has its jargon. Here's a string of the most common terms fish biologists use in these forecasts.

Year-class: Fish hatched in a particular year.

Young-of-the-Year (YOY): Generally, fish that hatch in the spring and summer and survive through fall, when DNR typically does "young-of-the-year" surveys to assess their survival.

Recruitment: Fish surviving to reach catchable age and enter the adult population.

Size structure: Generally, the proportion of fish occurring at different sizes. When biologists say they are taking a management action to try to improve size structure, they're often talking about trying to increase the number of bigger fish.

Northern Region
continued

not as abundant as the lake's muskellunge) and Lac Courte Oreilles (many mid-size fish that far out-number the lake's muskellunge). Recent research indicates that northern pike do not always out-compete muskies in our waters. In many lakes and most rivers, we have documented strong unstocked muskellunge populations coexisting with established northern pike. We now feel that if spawning and nursery habitat is intact, the two esocids can coexist.
–Frank Pratt, fisheries biologist, Hayward

Becky and Beth Sommerfeldt found February fishing to their liking, catching this 29-inch pike on Butternut Lake in Price County in 2005. Photo by Skip Sommerfeldt.

Price County

Butternut Lake

Public input sessions were held in 2005 for lakes in Price, Rusk Sawyer and Taylor counties as part of a pilot project by Upper Chippewa River Basin fish managers to start creating lake management plans to define the desired future condition of the fishery in those lakes. (See story page 4) The Butternut Lake Fishery Management Plan was completed in July 2005, and it contains goal statements, management strategies to achieve them, and objective standards to gauge progress. Stakeholders wanted to maintain a moderately high density and sustainable harvest of walleye while improving walleye size distribution. Participants clearly preferred a balance between muskellunge numbers and size, desiring neither a strictly "action" fishery with high catch rates, nor a strictly "trophy" fishery with a substantial proportion of the population longer than 50 inches. They expressed a strong desire to create and maintain good fishing for panfish, particularly black crappies, yellow perch, and bluegill. These desires will be incorporated in future stocking and regulation proposals.

Cranberry Lake

2005 electrofishing and netting surveys confirmed reports that Cranberry Lake provides good fishing opportunities for panfish, walleye, and largemouth bass. Predator/prey interactions in Cranberry Lake appear to be in balance, maintaining bluegill and black crappie populations in low to moderate abundance and allowing a substantial proportion of individuals to grow large. A sample of 181 black crappies 5 inches and longer were netted in August 2005. Of those, 72 percent reached or exceeded the "preferred" length of 10 inches and 46 percent were longer than 12 inches. A sample of 61 bluegills 3 inches and longer had a similar size distribution with 85 percent growing to "quality" size (6 inches) and 38 percent reaching the "preferred" length of 8 inches. This favorable growth is largely attributable to predation, particularly from walleyes, which prevents crappie and bluegill populations from becoming overabundant and stunted. As the word spreads about good fishing in Cranberry Lake, casual observations of increased fishing pressure have raised concerns about overharvest. Overexploitation can quickly shift the size structure of panfish populations downward, decreasing the proportion of desirable-size fish. To protect the high-quality fishery in Cranberry Lake, anglers are asked to voluntarily limit their daily harvest to no more than five black crappies over 10 inches long and no more than five bluegills over 8 inches long. Because good fishing for panfish depends on the right amount of predation from gamefish, we also ask anglers to practice restraint and limit walleye harvest to three or fewer fish per day.

Manitowish River

Last May the Mercer and Park Falls fisheries teams collected and fertilized 47,000 eggs from three female and three male sturgeon captured below the Turtle-Flambeau Dam. The effort marked the third success in artificially spawning sturgeon since annual attempts began in 1992. DNR provided 22,000 fertilized eggs to the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Hatchery under a cooperative fish rearing agreement. The remaining eggs were incubated and raised at the Wild Rose Hatchery and 18,300 sturgeon fingerlings were stocked into the Manitowish River in July, August, and September, 2005. Two successful propagation efforts from the mid-1990s have added two year classes into the Manitowish River sturgeon population between the Turtle-Flambeau and Rest Lake dams. Beginning in 2000, annual gillnet samples included immature sturgeon, some of which exceeded 40 inches in 2005. There is still no evidence of natural reproduction in the Manitowish River, but we remain optimistic about the prospects for successful restoration of a self-sustaining sturgeon population. Discussions are underway to modify seasonal operation of the Rest Lake Dam to provide more favorable flows for spawning habitat.

Pike Chain of Lakes

Four fisheries teams from northern Wisconsin combined efforts several times during 2005 to assess the fish community and estimate the density of walleye and muskellunge populations in Pike, Round, Amik, and Turner lakes. The fish community was similar in all four of the chain's lakes. Samples collected from 1994 to 2005 included 23 species in Amik, 24 in Pike, 23 in Round, and 19 in Turner. Game fish included walleyes, northern pike, smallmouth bass, muskellunge, and largemouth bass. Black crappies, bluegills, and pumpkinseeds were the most common panfish. No exotic fish species are known to occur in the Pike Chain of Lakes. However, two fish species with elevated protective status have been found in recent surveys. The greater redhorse is classified as "threatened" and lake sturgeon are listed as a "species of special concern."

Anglers can expect to find a low to moderate walleye density in the Pike Lake Chain. Round had the highest walleye density at 4.9 adults/acre, followed by Pike at 2.9/acre, Turner at 1.7/acre, and Amik at 0.9/acre. Walleye density is considered to be low at less than one adult/acre and moderate to high at 4 to 8 adults/acre. Turner had the highest proportion of preferred-sized walleyes 20 inches and longer. Walleye in the Pike Lake Chain grew slower than other walleye populations in northern Wisconsin, with male walleye growing to 15 inches in seven years and females reaching the same length in six years. Radio telemetry and recapture of marked fish indicated that walleye move among the four lakes of the Pike Chain, especially during their spawning period. A creel survey is currently underway to estimate angling pressure and harvest on the Pike Chain during the open water and ice covered periods in 2005 and 2006.

Because the density of muskellunge in the Pike Chain is unknown in April 2005 we began a survey to estimate adult musky density in Pike, Round, and Turner lakes. Examining the ratio of recaptured fish in a spring 2006 survey will allow us to estimate density. Of the 50 muskellunge marked in 2005 that were 20 inches or longer (stock size), 29 percent reached memorable size (38 inches) in Pike Lake. The size distribution of the adult musky population was similar in Round Lake, where 33 percent of 51 stock sized fish reached memorable length. The DNR currently classifies and manages the Pike Chain as an "action" fishery for muskellunge.

Management of fishery resources in the Pike Lake Chain may be subject to changes, depending on the feedback received on angler preferences in the Fisheries Management Visioning Session tentatively scheduled in 2006. (See story page 4).
–Jeff Scheirer, fisheries biologist, Park Falls

Washburn County

The bass size limit was removed on Long, Big and Middle McKenzie and Nancy lakes last May in efforts to maintain the size quality of largemouth bass and allow the forage base to recover. Largemouth bass populations had exploded after size limits went into effect in 1989, with angler catch rates, once considered good at 0.25 bass per hour, typically exceeding one bass per hour. Unfortunately, the forage base isn't keeping pace with the higher bass numbers, reflected in slower growth rates. Largemouth are taking two years longer to reach the statewide 14-inch minimum size limit and growth rates after they reach legal size are declining too. The forage mismatch also may be impacting natural recruitment and stocking success in some northwestern walleye fisheries. It's still too early to assess how the liberalized regulations are working, and if walleye populations will rebound. However, Long Lake had a fall walleye fingerling count 10 times larger than any in the past twelve years. The other three lakes have shown no increase. It may take some time. Bass anglers are indoctrinated to catch and release. Liberal regulations have little effect if people don't take advantage of them, so anglers are encouraged to catch their limit on these lakes.
–Larry Damman, fisheries biologist, Spooner

Barron County

Red Cedar Lake

About 3,800 adult walleye are present in Red Cedar Lake, similar to 2001, but lower than in the 1980s when the population was estimated at nearly 7,600 adult walleye. Red Cedar Lake also had a low density but quality-sized bass fishery. The southern portion of Red Cedar Lake contains more shallow water habitat that is better suited for largemouth bass and panfish. The northern and central portion of the lake contains mostly rocky shorelines with larger woody debris, better habitat for smallmouth bass. Northern pike were common on all three lakes with an average size structure. Yellow perch abundance appears to be down, but a desirable bluegill and black crappie population was present on the entire chain.

Granite Lake

Granite Lake has a moderate density walleye population but the size structure consists of mostly smaller fish in the 12 to16 inch size range. Largemouth bass were found in low numbers but the fish were in excellent condition. Modest numbers of bluegill, black crappie and yellow perch were found with a slightly above average size structure.

Polk County

Balsam Lake

Largemouth bass are the dominant gamefish, with about 25,000 larger than 8 inches roaming the lake. Bass regulations were liberalized in 2002 on Balsam Lake because bass growth rates declined and the overall condition of bass was poorer when compared to past surveys. The regulation is designed to reduce the number of smaller bass in the lake and allow the larger bass that remain to grow faster and fatter because of less competition for the forage base. The walleye population continues to decline – only 1,650 adult walleye were present, about half the number in 2002. We don't know why the walleye population is still declining. We have been aggressively stocking walleye in the lake over the past decade with limited success. It appears predation from other fish may be limiting walleye recruitment. In 2004 and 2006 larger size walleye fingerling (averaging around 7 inches in length) will be stocked in an effort to increase recruitment of stocked walleye. More restrictive walleye regulations may also be pursued in the future to protect the declining walleye population.

Bone Lake

Based on the results of our 2005 spring survey, the musky fishery in Bone Lake appears to be lower than historic levels, but quality fish are present in desirable numbers. More specifically, 247 muskellunge greater than 30 inches were captured in 2005. Of those fish, 53 or 22 percent were larger than 40 inches – more than double the average for a typical northern Wisconsin muskellunge lake. In addition, five females in excess of 45 inches were collected. Also, for the first time, 40-inch male muskellunge were present in the population.

Apple River Watershed

Fisheries staff surveyed about 50 sites on the entire Apple River watershed and all tributary streams from the headwaters at Staples Lake downstream to the Polk County line. Smallmouth and largemouth bass and northern pike were present in low numbers in the Apple River downstream of Amery to the St. Croix/Polk County line as well as Wappogassett and Balsam branches upstream to the Kennedy Dam. Only largemouth bass and northern pike were collected upstream of Amery in the Apple River and Fox Creek. Future plans may consist of reintroducing smallmouth bass upstream of Amery. Burns, Omer and Peabody creeks had low density trout populations, and they are marginally fishable because of excessive tag alder and reed canary growth. Trout restoration efforts are planned for Bull Brook, Behning and Friday creeks.

In winter 2005, DNR in cooperation with the Polk County Sportsman Club, Osceola Rod and Gun Club and the Polk County Parks Department, installed an aeration system in Lotus Lake near Dresser. Largemouth bass, northern pike and bluegill have been stocked over the past two years in an effort to restore the fishery. It will likely take several years before anglers can expect large numbers of fish for angling purposes. In summer 2005, DNR in cooperation with the Pipe Lakes Management District, installed 40 half-log structures in Pipe Lake to provide cover as well as increase spawning success for smallmouth bass and other fish species. In fall 2005, fisheries staff replaced the aeration system at Twin Lakes near Mikana in Barron County with a newer system expected to double the air flow and hopefully prevent future fish winterkills.

About 2,400 feet of stream habitat restoration work was conducted on Turtle Creek in southwestern Barron County. In addition, a small unauthorized rock structure that prevented upstream fish passage and impounded several large springs was removed from Osceola Creek in western Polk County.
– Heath Benike, fisheries biologist, Barron

Bayfield County

Lake Nebagamon

A spring 2005 netting survey found walleye averaged 16 inches, but walleye density appears to have declined from past surveys. Extensive stocking of walleye fry, small fingerling and large fingerling as well as spawning reef construction and an attempt to reestablish a riverine spawning population of walleye in Minnesuing Creek have been conducted in the recent past in an attempt to bolster walleye densities. Reports from anglers and the creel clerk indicated a good number of walleye in the 10- to 13-inch range being caught in 2005. These walleye may provide an increase to walleye densi-

Leah Hujik, 4, caught this 13-inch crappie on Little Crooked Lake in Vilas County in 2005. Photo by Bob Hujik.

ties in the near future. Spring electrofishing for smallmouth bass found a good size structure with a 14.1-inch average and 50 percent being over 14 inches. Northern pike from the 2005 spring netting survey averaged 21.1 inches with the largest caught being 40.9 inches.

South Fork of the White River

An intensive trout habitat project was started in fall 2005 and will continue in summer 2006 to improve trout habitat in the South Fork of the White River, which has been identified as a major source of recruitment for the White River as a whole.

Douglas County

Whitefish Lake

Walleye, smallmouth and largemouth bass population estimates were conducted in the spring of 2005. Densities of 1.05 adult walleye per acre were similar to surveys conducted in 1988 and 1991, and are typical of low productivity lakes in this area. The size structure of walleye remained good with 55 percent being over 15 inches in length. Smallmouth and largemouth bass densities were low; however, both had good size structures with 54 percent of smallmouth greater than 14 inches and 55 percent of largemouth greater than 15 inches.

–Scott Toshner, fisheries biologist, Brule

Iron County

Management efforts since the mid-1990s to improve walleye population size structure and to increase panfish angling opportunities are paying off on Pine Lake. (See story page 4) A self-sustaining panfish fishery now exists; and some large bluegill and yellow perch are showing up in the catch. Other waters where a similar strategy is being implemented are Island, Spider and Long lakes in Iron County, and Lake Galilee in Ashland County.

The **Gile Flowage** is the only known inland lake in Wisconsin to be infested with the exotic Spiny Water Flea, which may have been transported to the Gile by anglers fishing in Chequamegon Bay of Lake Superior. Spiny water fleas are native to northern Europe and prey on other smaller species of zooplankton, potentially shifting native zooplankton populations and possibly impacting survival and recruitment of juvenile fishes. Overall impacts on the fish community cannot be predicted at this time. Based upon events in Fish Lake, Minnestoa, there is evidence that sufficient predation by adult panfish can eliminate spiny water fleas, so in 2005 we transferred 34,289 bluegill and pumpkinseed to the Gile from other waters overcrowded with panfish in an effort to increase panfish density and eradicate the exotic invaders. Future stockings are planned. Anglers are advised to strictly adhere to guidelines posted at all the boat landings to prevent further infestation of the Spiny Water Flea into other inland waters.

–Jeff Roth, fisheries biologist, Mercer

Vilas County

Kentuck Lake

As of November 1, 2005, the walleye regulation on this lake changed from a 28-inch minimum and a bag limit of one to no minimum size but only one fish kept may be 14 inches or larger. The final bag limit will depend on tribal declarations. This relaxing of the regulation was due to an increase in the adult walleye population from a low of 574 fish in 1999 to 9,549 in 2005. This high density walleye fishery may be having negative effects on the historically good bass/panfish fishery of Kentuck Lake so DNR will be pursuing a more restrictive bass regulation (18-inch minimum and one fish bag limit) starting in May 2007. Until this regulation takes effect we are asking anglers to practice catch and release for bass on this lake.

Long Lake

Illegal rainbow smelt introductions in the early 1990s harmed this fish community; once a thriving natural walleye fishery, we must now stock it to provide a meager fishing opportunity. In the fall of 2005, 5,600 yearling lake trout were stocked in an effort to establish a population and provide a cold water predator on the abundant smelt forage base. To protect the lake trout this lake will have a 30-inch minimum length and one fish bag limit in place starting May 2006. Anglers are encouraged to report any lake trout they may catch to the Woodruff DNR office. Seining or dip-netting of smelt is not allowed on this lake.

Sparkling Lake

Since 2002, we have annually stocked 3,000 6- to 8-inch walleye fingerlings into this lake in an effort rebuild the fishery. Spring surveys to estimate survival of these stocked fish has found better than 30 percent survival in the last three years, compared to almost no return after prior stockings of smaller fingerlings. In spring 2005 we captured many fish from the 2002 stocking that were mature and attempting to spawn. Hopefully, if we see continued success we will again have a naturally sustained walleye fishery in this lake. This work is part of a larger 10-year UW-Madison project to evaluate the responses of exotic species such as rainbow smelt and rusty crayfish to biological control and manual removals.

Trout Lake

Trout Lake contains a genetically unique population of lake trout maintained primarily by stocking. Much work has been done in recent years evaluating the status of this population but many questions remain. As part of this work we have marked hundreds of adult lake trout with colored plastic tags to monitor their growth and estimate the size of the population. Anglers who catch lake trout can help fish management staff by reporting the number of trout caught and if they contained a tag or not. If anglers obtain the tag number and provide an address, we will provide the known history of that particular lake trout.

–Steve Gilbert, fisheries biologist, Woodruff

Florence and Forest counties

We completed comprehensive fishery surveys on Sealion and Cosgrove lakes in 2005. Sealion Lake had a fair bass population, some very nice sized. There is an abundance of woody cover to fish. Bluegills and crappies were the most common panfish, both with an average size structure. Walleyes were estimated at less than one adult per acre, but the majority exceeded 20 inches. We found good numbers of largemouth bass in Cosgrove Lake, mostly shorter than 14 inches. Bluegills were the most common panfish, having an average size below 7 inches. Adult walleyes were estimated at only one per acre, but like Sealion, most were over 20 inches long.

A late spring netting survey of the Spread Eagle Chain in Florence County found a moderate panfish population, mostly bluegills with some crappies and rock bass. Most were on the small side. The chain has a diverse fishery of panfish, largemouth and smallmouth bass, northern pike, and walleyes, along with a developing musky fishery.

Anglers should again be able to access the Brule River Flowage (the "Backwaters") in Florence County starting with the open-water season as water levels have returned to normal after a reservoir-drawdown. The flowage has a diverse warmwater fishery, with walleyes and muskies being the most popular for anglers.

Butternut and Franklin lakes in Florence County should provide some excellent fishing for northern pike in 2006 when they go to the standard five bag, no minimum size regulations. Studies of the lakes showed the prior trophy regulation didn't produce greater numbers of larger pike as expected, but overall numbers are up. A smaller pike population should also help walleye numbers improve.

DNR stream surveys in 2005 found good numbers of trout in Johnson and Woods creeks in Florence County. Sections of the Pine and Popple wild rivers continue to produce good brook trout populations, with an occasional trophy brown.

An intensive beaver removal effort in tributaries of the Pine and Popple rivers has greatly improved conditions for trout in that watershed. Streams are again running colder and trout can again seek spawning sites and refuge from the warm waters of summer. That was especially important during the drought and warm water conditions of this past summer.

–Bob Young, fisheries biologist, Woodruff

Oneida County

Mildred, Thompson, Two Sisters, Clear, Carrol and Madeline lakes showed good numbers of bass. Mildred, Carrol and Clear Lakes had the highest densities while Madeline and Thompson had more large bass. Two Sisters and Clear both had moderate-density walleye populations with very good size structure. Thompson showed lower numbers but good size of adult walleyes, and there was a year-class of fish in the 10 to 12 inch range just entering the fishery.

Thompson, Madeline and Carrol had strong populations of northern pike along with respectable numbers of muskellunge. Clear Lake has had a 50-inch minimum length limit on its low-density muskellunge population since 2003. The largest fish handled last spring was a 46.5 inch female and over half the fish in our nets were 40 inches or larger. A musky survey on Lake Tomahawk found very good size structure, including two 35-pound females. Lake Tomahawk also had the best size and numbers of bowfin (also known as dogfish) I've ever seen.

A panfish survey on Pelican Lake turned up great size and numbers of bluegill, along with good numbers of crappie and several year-classes of perch just beginning to reach catchable size. A fall survey of Oscar Jenny Lake found abundant bluegill, along with excellent largemouth bass size and numbers and a few large northern pike.

Last summer's Woodboro Springs dredging project was a success. (See story page 5)

After two years of budget cuts resulting in almost no trout stocking in Oneida County, trout quotas are back online. Look for brown trout in Dorothy and Squash Lakes; rainbows are planned for Perch, Hawk, Long and Little Bass lakes. Brook trout will go into Mercer Springs and Brown, Gudegast, Noisy, Scott, Starks and Thunder creeks.

–John Kubisiak, senior fisheries biologist, Rhinelander

Lake Superior

Spring is one of the best times of year to visit Chequamegon Bay. Shortly after ice-out, anglers start trolling for coho and chinook salmon, brown trout, splake, and lake trout but may also catch walleye and northern pike. Conservative regulations have created a trophy smallmouth bass fishery and the opportunity for catching large walleyes in Chequamegon Bay in May and June. Studies in Chequamegon Bay indicated that walleye and northern pike were consuming newly stocked brown trout and splake, spurring DNR to start stocking them offshore in hopes of boosting their survival rate. Past studies also have indicated that there was a poor return on stocked chinook salmon in Lake Superior. In 2005, DNR and the Saxon Harbor and Apostle Islands fishing clubs cooperated to hold chinooks in net pens, built and maintained by the fishing clubs, for a period of time in local marinas before stocking. We hope the salmon will imprint and return to those areas to create angling opportunities.Many of Lake Superior's tributary rivers have excellent steelhead populations in spring. Trolling near the mouths of the tributaries also provides an opportunity to catch trout and salmon. The most important work being done to sustain and improve stream spawning trout and salmon populations involves projects in the headwater areas of many of Lake Superior's tributaries. (See story page 4).

Trolling around the Apostle Islands in summer can produce nice catches of lake trout with the average fish measuring over 22 inches. More restrictive regulations on recreational and commercial fishing, refuges, and sea lamprey control have allowed lake trout to increase dramatically since the 1960s. Natural reproduction continues to support the population among the Apostle Islands: 88 percent of the lake trout caught were wild fish.

As water temperatures cool in the fall, trolling off the mouths of the tributaries can produce good catches of brown trout, chinook and coho salmon. Fall is still a good time for smallmouth bass and walleye in Chequamegon Bay. Regardless of the season, anglers are encouraged to check with the local sport shops for the latest weather and fishing conditions.

–Michael Seider, fisheries biologist, Bayfield

Northeast Region

Door County

Lake Michigan and Green Bay, including tributary streams

For the fourth summer in a row, chinook fishing on Lake Michigan was nothing short of phenomenal. However, all that glitters is not golden and there are early warning signs that this fishery might not be sustainable, among them decreasing length and weight at age and a noticeable decline in their relative plumpness. Concurrent with those warning signs is evidence of a decline in the alewife population, the Lake Michigan forage base that supports the chinook fishery. The growing imbalance likely results from increasing naturalized chinook reproduction in Lake Michigan tributaries and emigration of chinook from Lake Huron. Because there is no control over the natural reproduction of chinook, the only way to reduce the demand on the forage base and to increase the odds of continued good Chinook fishing is to decrease stocking. To that end, the four states with management authority on Lake Michigan have agreed to stock 25 percent fewer chinook starting in spring 2006. Wisconsin's "share" will result in 21 percent fewer chinook stocked by Wisconsin hatcheries.

Other recent changes in the Lake Michigan fishery due to budget reductions include elimination of brook trout stocking and a decrease in brown trout fingerlings. Additionally, DNR has reduced the projected quota of steelhead for stocking into Lake Michigan because of reduced flows at the Kettle Moraine Springs Hatchery.

Lake Michigan and Green Bay water levels are predicted to remain well below average into the first half of 2006, so anglers planning to fish the lakeshore are advised to check with local municipalities before going to a particular launch and use caution. On a positive note, there's a new boat launch on Little Sturgeon Bay, an improved ramp at Bues Point in Moonlight Bay on the Lake Michigan side, and the boat launch at Old Stone Quarry at the mouth of Sturgeon Bay is being expanded, with completion expected mid-summer 2006.

Chinook fishing was phenomenal for the fourth summer in a row. 11-year-old Christopher Ettner reeled in an 18-pound chinook salmon last summer near Sturgeon Bay on the Green Bay side. Photo by Michael Ettner.

The low lake and bay level also affect access of trout and salmon into Door County's tributary streams. Whitefish Bay and Heins creeks are stocked annually with steelhead. Runs of adult steelhead and other trout and salmon into these and other Door County tributary streams in spring and fall depend heavily on runoff from snow-melt and rain. If our streams have adequate flow they can provide some exciting opportunities.

Smallmouth bass populations along the Door County shoreline remain strong and should provide exciting fishing in 2006. The

Northeast Region
continued

strong 1995 year class of smallmouth will continue to provide abundant fish in excess of 18 inches. Trophy-sized fish above 20 inches from the 1995 and older year-classes are not uncommon.

Walleye populations in and around Sturgeon Bay / Little Sturgeon Bay received important supplemental stocking in 2003 and 2004 as nearly 425,000 walleye fingerlings were divided between the two bays. This walleye stocking effort should help establish two good year classes of walleye, which should be available to anglers for several years to come.

Great Lakes musky have been stocked for four consecutive years in the Sturgeon Bay area now as part of a DNR effort to re-establish reproducing populations of this native species in Green Bay. (See story page 1) Bragging-size muskies have already been reported caught in Green Bay in recent years. Fishing for northern pike should continue to provide good action for both open water and ice anglers.

–Paul Peeters, fisheries biologist, Sturgeon Bay

Manitowoc County

Lake Michigan and tributary streams

Following the spring melt, anglers can hook steelhead, brown trout or northern pike in many Lake Michigan tributaries. Fishing in harbors and off piers can be very productive with anglers harvesting a variety of species. Anglers looking for a different fishing experience may want to try dip-netting suckers or smelt as they migrate upstream.

Summer should again see anglers catching good numbers of Lake Michigan trout and salmon. There should be a good number of older chinook salmon still in the lake. For those anglers willing to travel further offshore, steelhead angling can be exciting with favorable wind and water temperatures. If conditions don't permit fishing on Lake Michigan, try fishing for smallmouth bass in the larger rivers. Populations are very good and fishing can be productive.

With the onset of fall, salmon spawning migrations begin and if stream flows are good, fishing should be excellent in the Manitowoc, East and West Twin and Kewaunee rivers. For a little more solitude, try fishing smaller streams such as Stony, Silver or Fischer creeks.

–Steve Hogler, fisheries biologist, Mishicot

Inland lakes and rivers of Calumet, Door, Kewaunee and Manitowoc counties

Northern pike and panfish anglers should have good success in catching these fish during the ice-fishing season on local lakes. Anglers also may target large northern pike on local tributary streams during late winter. Walleye and yellow perch are always a good bet early in the open water season, with largemouth bass and bluegill fishing improving as the water warms in late May.

In Manitowoc County, at Walla Hi County Park, work is continuing on a stream restoration project that has removed several remnant dams and structures from the grounds of a former hatchery. Future work includes restoring a more natural stream channel to Millhome Creek, a stream that supports native brook trout. Following the completion of the project, we hope anglers will enjoy improved fishing for brook trout at this scenic location.

–Steve Hogler, fisheries biologist, Mishicot

Winnebago System

(Wolf and upper Fox rivers, lakes Winnebago, Butte des Morts, Winneconne and Poygan)

DNR crews, aided by numerous volunteers, captured and tagged more than 7,200 walleye from around the system in spring spawning surveys. Males ranged from 12 to 22.1 inches and averaged 16.3 inches and 1.6 pounds, identical to last year. One-quarter of the males were 17.5 inches or larger! Fifty-five percent were less than 16 inches, due to the number of fish from the large 2001 year-class, which make up a significant portion of the male spawners and will for a number of years.

Females in 2005 ranged from 14.9 to 28.6 inches with an average of 22.4 inches and 4.6 pounds, also very similar to last year. Judging by the lack of small females tagged in spring 2005, the 2001 females were not quite mature then, but it should be a different story this spring as they had another summer to grow and should be up on the marshes in good numbers. Now the female spawning stock is made up of mostly medium sized females 21 to 25 inches. These are 7- to 10-year-old fish from the mid- to late- 1990s year-classes. About a quarter of the females spawning in 2005 were less than 21 inches, while 15 percent were 25 inches or larger.

Index trawling in August 2005 again showed a good food base, perhaps too good as anglers complained about slowed action when mid-summer arrived.

Of most interest to walleye anglers is another big year-class of walleye, the fourth largest on record. Three of the five largest hatches have occurred consecutively since 2003, putting us up to our rod tips in younger walleye, meaning fishing should be good to great for at least the next 10 years!

Anglers looking to take home a tasty meal from this excellent walleye population in 2006 can expect good numbers of medium-sized walleye in the rivers in April for the annual spawning run, along with an increase in small females and a fair number of the large old females.

Bass: Largemouth and smallmouth bass continue to be relatively abundant throughout the system as well. Based on lengths and weights collected by DNR and tournament sponsors in 2005, largemouth ranged from 14 to 21 inches, and smallmouth 14 to 20 inches. The majority of the largemouths seen at the tournaments were 14 to 16 inches, but they're not skinny. Despite the smaller size structure, with a little effort and, as always, patience, bass anglers should be able to keep busy with some "bucket mouth" action. Anglers are reminded to maneuver gently around all vegetation on the system, as it is valuable habitat.

Smallmouths are more common in the upper rivers near faster current and rock or gravel areas. Don't overlook the Little Wolf and Embarrass rivers, and smallies have also really taken off on Lake Winnebago in the last few years as well.

Northern pike and… Musky? The system continues to have good numbers of pike in it. While not known as "musky water," there is a small but self-sustaining population of true musky in the Winnebago system, particularly in the upper lakes. However, anglers may be surprised to see an increase in smaller muskies showing up on the end of their lines in 2006. These are Great Lakes strain musky, which DNR started stocking in the system in 2002, as part of a reintroduction effort. (See story page 1). In late November 2004, about 25 or 30 of the spotted muskies were captured and were all 29 or 30 inches, and were in excellent shape and growing very well. It's likely these fish are now in the low- to mid-30 inch range.

Panfish and white bass: Bluegill populations have benefited from the increase of rooted aquatic vegetation over the last few years. Good areas to start are Sunset Bay and inside the breakwall at Terrell's Island on Lake Butte des Morts, Boom Bay and Page's Slough on Lake Poygan and the numerous bays and channels along the west shore of Lake Winnebago. Perch have also benefited from the increased vegetation. The perch year-class in 2005 was down from the previous two years, but still respectable. Finally, for anglers liking fast action or something to keep kids interested, you can't beat the annual run of white bass on the Wolf and upper Fox Rivers in mid-May. Good shore fishing opportunities are present in Winneconne, Fremont, Gill's Landing east of Weyauwega on the Wolf and Oshkosh, Omro and Eureka on the upper Fox.

–Kendall Kamke, senior fisheries biologist, Oshkosh

Green Lake County

Big Green Lake

Protection and improvement of fragile shallow water areas has improved spawning habitat for northern pike, largemouth bass and panfish species. Smallmouth bass continue to thrive in this lake filled with rocky shoreline habitat, and improvements in water clarity and vegetation management have helped to keep the low density walleye population an important part of this fishery. A small number of musky have historically been stocked by local musky clubs. These fish have been showing up in surveys and anglers' incidental catches. Musky anglers have expressed interest in this addition to the fishery and we have added them to the annual stocking quotas in very low densities to be managed as a trophy fishery.

The coldwater trout fishery, made up of lake trout and Seeforellen brown trout, is sustained by stocking. Both species provide excellent action in open water or through the ice. The lake trout population continues to thrive while the Seeforellen are in their infancy as a great addition to this unique coldwater fishery. Densities are low, but fish up to 10 pounds have been reported. The lake also contains a healthy inland cisco population.

Delany Allen and Kevin Kapuscinski display a channel catfish caught from the Fox River. Photo by Jody Kapuscinski.

Lake Puckaway

The 32-inch minimum size limit and bag of one for northern pike continues to provide a high density northern pike fishery. Catch rates can be extremely high with many fish in the upper-20 to low-30-inch range, although more legal fish have been showing up in surveys and reported in anglers' catches. Walleye populations remain healthy and should continue to provide excellent action. Fall surveys did show large numbers of gizzard shad, which no doubt will play a role in fishing success for these species. Largemouth bass and panfish appear to be at lower densities but exhibit excellent growth rates and size structure. Improvements to habitat again are the key to helping out these species.

Little Green Lake

This productive body of water has always been noted for its healthy panfish populations. Improvements in water quality and aquatic plant management have helped them thrive. Walleye populations remain healthy and are supported by DNR and local club stocking efforts. The musky fishery, also maintained by stocking, provides for one of southern Wisconsin's best musky lakes and continues to produce 40-plus inchers.

Fox River System

This large productive river system is home to walleye, small and largemouth bass, northern pike and panfish. A number of dam removals in recent years has helped to improve habitat and create a barrier-free stretch of river. Channel catfish populations remain high; flathead populations seem stable and should improve with the new bag and possession limit. Survey information has shown that it takes, on average, 10 years to reach 30 inches and nearly 20 years to reach 40 inches.

Marquette and Waushara county lakes

Both counties contain a good number of small pothole lakes, most of which are highly developed but do provide good public access and contain good populations of largemouth bass and panfish. Some may contain small numbers of walleye maintained by stocking. Low density populations of northern pike are also present in some lakes. A few contain high- density, slow-growing populations of largemouth bass and low-density bluegill populations We have been trying to improve this situation by eliminating the 14-inch size limit to reduce bass numbers, improve growth rates for largemouth, and panfish numbers will increase to better balance the fishery. Improvements in aquatic plant management and nearshore habitat protection also continue to play an important role in improvements to the lake fishery.

Marquette and Waushara county trout streams

This part of the state provides for some of the best trout fishing anywhere. Miles of public ownership, along with numerous road crossings, provide good access to most streams. As always, ask permission to access private land. Any questions about this report can be addressed to (608) 297-7058.

– David Bartz, fisheries biologist, Montello

Marinette County

Preliminary results from a comprehensive lake survey on High Falls Reservoir in spring 2005 sampled walleye, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass and northern pike in good numbers and good size ranges. The muskellunge population also looks very healthy, with the largest fish surveyed at 51.5 inches and several other large muskies collected. There also appears to be a healthy fishery for bluegill and black crappie, with good numbers and size structure. The yellow perch population appears small in its size structure.

During 2005, we continued cooperative effort with the Peshtigo River Sportsman's Society to stock 500,000 walleye fry into High Falls Reservoir. Water levels should return to normal by the 2006 open water season on that reservoir and Johnson Falls Reservoir after drawdowns for dam repairs. No major impacts to the fisheries are expected.

Preliminary results from a comprehensive survey on Hilbert Lake indicate a low-density, high-quality walleye population consistent with that of a stocked population. The majority were of legal size or larger with no sign of natural reproduction. The largemouth bass population appears to have good numbers and size structure. We also noted good numbers of northern pike and smallmouth bass. Panfish were numerous and of a good size, particularly bluegill and black crappies.

During the summer and fall of 2005, baseline lake surveys were carried out on Johnson Falls Flowage, Reservoir Pond, White Rapids Flowage, Caldron Falls Flowage, Beecher Lake, Big and Little Newton Lakes. Initial review of the data revealed that White Rapids has a very healthy fishery supporting walleye, bass, and several panfish species. Reservoir Pond also had a healthy bass population and many panfish, although panfish tended to be small.

Trout stream surveys on the Upper Middle Inlet Creek, North Branch of Beaver Creek and K C Creek indicate healthy trout populations.

We cooperated with Michigan DNR and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in a three-day survey of the lake sturgeon population below White Rapids dam on the Menominee River. We captured and released 312 sturgeon, with an average length of 33 inches compared to an average length of 49 inches in sturgeon surveyed below the Menominee Dam, the lowest dam on the river with a direct link to Green Bay. Only 11 sturgeon were more than 50 inches in length.

Oconto County

Projects to remove the Hemlock and Knowles dams from the North Branch of the Oconto River continued in 2005 with further restoration of the two sites where dams were removed in 2004. Continuous temperature loggers were deployed in 2005 and will continue to be deployed in 2006 to monitor the river water temperatures and to evaluate any difference before and after removal of the dams. This project was conducted in conjunction with the U.S. Forest Service and additional funding was provided by local chapters of Trout Unlimited.

In August 2005, DNR replaced two new culverts on Swede John Creek and established a new stream channel. The creek had a chronic problem of washing out and the old culverts were creating fish passage issues. The new culverts installed were larger and placed in at the correct height so as not to impede fish passage. In addition, a 160-

foot section of the stream channel was diverted away from the shoulder of the roadway where erosion was becoming a problem. The new stream channel will be armored with stone to prevent down-cutting and provide a better substrate for fish and aquatic invertebrates. This project will be completed during summer 2006 when specialized equipment for working on soft terrain can be brought in to install additional stone. The Town of Silver Cliff provided labor and materials to help with this project.

The project to stock wild trout in the South Branch of the Oconto River continued in 2005, with DNR working cooperatively with the Oconto River Watershed Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Suring Sportsman's Club to raise wild brook and brown trout for stocking. No brook trout were stocked out in 2005 but 25,000 large fingerling brown trout were stocked during fall 2005. DNR crews also shocked and captured wild brook and brown trout in fall 2005 to collect eggs to be reared at the Trout Unlimited Underhill facility.

A trout population estimate survey on the South Branch of the Oconto River suggests good trout population numbers.

During 2005, baseline stream surveys were carried out at several sites on the Lower North Branch of the Oconto River Watershed covering portions of Oconto and Forest counties. A total of 29 streams were electroshocked, including several trout streams. Many of the streams surveyed were facing low water levels and higher than normal water temperatures during summer 2005, but still showed very good brook trout production because many of the streams are spring-fed.

–Justine Hasz, senior fisheries biologist, Peshtigo

Brown County

Lower Fox River and southern Green Bay

We completed three targeted fishing surveys on the Fox River and lower Green Bay in 2005.

The Great Lakes muskellunge reintroduction program continues to grow and excite musky anglers. (See story page 1) We captured 79 muskellunge during our 2005 spring survey, ranging from 12 to 50 inches, averaging 38.5 inches, and up to 40 pounds. We also collected eggs and milt for transfer to the Wild Rose State Hatchery and later stocking. Our southern Green Bay and lower Fox River index shocking turned up a below-average amount of young-of-the-year walleye, indicating that a poor year-class was produced during 2005. The abundance of adult walleye from our fall surveys, however, indicates that walleye fishing should be excellent on the Fox River and Green Bay during 2006 and beyond. Walleye ranged from 8 to 26 inches, and averaged 16.5 inches. We also observed an incredible number of gizzard shad in the Fox River this fall, which presumably made fishing difficult, even though good numbers of adult walleye were present. Fall musky fishing was slow during 2005, not for a lack of muskellunge, but the abundance of gizzard shad. Muskellunge captured during surveys ranged from 12 to 45 inches and averaged 32 inches. Green Bay and its tributaries will once again provide ample musky fishing opportunities with true trophy potential during 2006. Anglers

Anglers catching and keeping tagged fish are asked return the tag and fishing information (date, location, water temperature, fish length, weight, etc.) to the address on the tag. Anglers that practice catch and release should leave the tag in the fish, note the tag number, and send the information to the address on the tag, call (920) 662-5480, or e-mail Kevin.Kapuscinski@dnr.state.wi.us. Information we collect from anglers through tag returns is vital to effectively manage the fishery.

–Rod Lange, fisheries technician, and Kevin Kapuscinski, fisheries biologist, Green Bay

Marinette and Oconto counties

Outlying waters of Green Bay

Summer trawling surveys for yellow perch in Green Bay indicated another good year-class was produced in 2005, following good year-classes produced in 2002 and 2004 and an excellent year-class in 2003. This is good news for anglers, as the Natural Resources Board in December increased sport bag limits to 15 starting May 20, 2006.

Due to the high numbers produced in 2003, average growth of fish from that year-class was below average at age one and continued to be below average at age 2 (5.9 inches). Due to increased production over the past few years and those recent year-classes entering the fishery, yellow perch fishing has started to improve and sport harvest has increased in Green Bay. Data collected during the 2005 summer creel survey revealed that 63 percent of the sport harvest were fish from the 2003 year class and 25 percent from the 2002 year class. A majority of the perch caught (80 percent) were 7 to 10 inches and a few fish (5 percent) were 11 to 13 inches. Most of these fish were 7-year-old fish produced in 1998. We believe that continued successful production of yellow perch should yield good fishing in 2006.

We implemented a very intensive effort in 2005 to survey the lake sturgeon population in the lower Menominee River from seven events July through October. We caught and tagged 278 sturgeon with an average size of 49 inches. The fall hook and line fishery produced 136 lake sturgeon from 50 to 65 inches in the lower Menominee River compared to 155 in 2003. We interviewed over 100 anglers during the fall season and found general approval of the season and harvest. Finally, we inserted ultrasonic transmitters into 14 adult sturgeon and we'll track their movements between the Menominee and Peshtigo rivers for the next year.

Fall 2005 brown trout brood stock collections in the Menominee River found higher numbers of adult fish returning to the river than in the previous three years. Most were Seeforellen strain stocked by DNR in 2002, 2003 and 2004 and averaged 25 inches. The largest brown trout captured was 31 inches. The higher numbers returning support angler reports of increased catch rates in Green Bay. Large numbers of chinook salmon, walleye, and whitefish were also observed during the fall brown trout collections. Walleye fishing in the Menominee River and surrounding area of Green Bay has been good for the past few years and should continue based on the numbers seen this fall.

DNR continued efforts to restore the spotted muskellunge population in Green Bay by stocking fingerling and yearling fish into the Menominee and Peshtigo rivers in 2005. (See story page 1). Anglers have reported catching tagged fish in the 30- and 40-inch range with one fish reported at 48 inches. Anglers catching tagged fish are asked to note the tag number and fishing information (date, location, water temp, length, weight, etc.) and send the information to the address on the tag, call (715-582-5052), or e-mail Matthew.Mangan@dnr.state.wi.us.

–Matt Mangan, fisheries biologist, Mike Donofrio, fisheries supervisor, Peshtigo

Shawano County

Shawano Lake

Fall boomshocking surveys captured good numbers of largemouth bass ranging from 2.8 to 19.9 inches and averaging 11.3 inches. About 32 percent were over 14 inches. Bluegills up to 8.3 inches were sampled with 26 percent over 6 inches. Walleye reproduction appeared to be very poor in 2005 with no young-of-the-year sampled during fall surveys; most of the adult walleye population is comprised of fish hatched from year-classes in the mid- to late- 1990s. Only 11 adult walleyes were sampled in the fall survey and all were 14+ inches. On a positive note, musky fishing has been and should continue to be very good. Anglers are reporting improved musky fishing with several 50+ inch fish showing up in the catch. This past summer DNR stocked 6,000 fall fingerling musky.

Wolf River (Outagamie, Waupaca, and Shawano counties)

DNR fisheries biologists are researching flathead catfish populations within the Wolf River system to document flathead catfish seasonal movement, habitat use, harvest, and population characteristics of this popular sportfish and important top predator. In 2005, DNR fisheries crews captured 528 flatheads during hoop net surveys in locations near Fremont, Gills Landing and New London that ranged up to 47 inches (or 56 pounds) with 58 percent of the catch over 31 inches (or 16 pounds). In addition to collecting length and weight information, biologists are taking a sample of pectoral fin spines to determine the age of this long-lived species. Growth was highly variable with most flatheads attaining 31 inches (or 16 pounds) in 10 to 14 years. Anglers should report tagged fish, along with catch date and location, tag number, length, whether the fish was kept or released, angler's name and address to the address on the tag or call (715) 526-4227. Anglers are asked to not remove tags from fish they release.

Waupaca and Shawano county trout streams

In the Waupaca River, 2005 stream electrofishing surveys indicate that trout populations and size structure are improving. Young-of-the-year numbers were up 36 percent from the last survey and 46 percent higher than the 10-year average. In addition, numbers of 12+ inch were 34 percent higher than the average. The wild trout stocking program has been very important to bolstering trout populations in the Waupaca River. Annually, the river is stocked with 18,000 feral brown trout fingerlings. To date, such stocked wild trout comprise almost 40 percent of the adult population.

Electrofishing surveys on other streams in Southern and Central Waupaca County show population density and size structure at or above average. Surveys in Shawano County show some decline in numbers which may be partly due to low water/flow conditions and warm summer temperatures in 2005.

–Al Niebur, fisheries biologist, Shawano

South Central Region

Lafayette County

Yellowstone Lake

Already abundant with channel catfish, walleye, crappies, bluegill, and largemouth bass, this lake now sustains a fishable population of smallmouth bass averaging 13 inches with fish up to 18 inches. Most abundant in the lake are crappies and walleye. Walleye 15 to 18 inches comprised 42 percent of walleye sampled in 2005, with 34 percent greater than 18 inches. The 2002 year class of crappies still supports a tremendous number of fish averaging 9 inches. Yellowstone Lake also maintains a low density, high quality northern pike and musky fishery.

Steiner Branch

This small 4.25 mile stream contains the only fishable brook trout population in Lafayette County and contains brown trout as well. Brook trout are now responding to habitat work completed along a 1.25 mile stretch in 2003, showing an increase in adult fish and natural reproduction. Establishment of this brook trout population is ongoing with more trout habitat work scheduled and a catch-and-release status at this time.

Pecatonica River and East Branch Pecatonica River

Even with manure-related fish kills in 2004, this river system continues to produce one of the better channel catfish fisheries in south central Wisconsin. Channel catfish in the 19 to 23-inch range are abundant with some fish up to 30 inches. Flathead catfish are also present with some measuring 42 inches. We have tagged 875 channel catfish along with 44 flathead catfish. Anglers catching a tagged fish are asked to record the tag number, date of catch, length of fish, and location caught and call (608) 935-1935 or send to the fisheries staff at the Dodgeville Service Center, 1500 N. Johns St., Dodgeville, WI 53533. These river systems also offer anglers the opportunity to pursue walleye and smallmouth bass.

Iowa County

Ley Creek

Ley Creek supports a mixed brown trout / brook trout fishery with an estimated 200 adult fish per mile (pre-habitat work). Brown trout are most abundant and range from 5 to 16 inches. Brook trout are located in its upper portions and range from 5 to 12 inches. About 3,800 feet of trout habitat work was completed on the lower half of the public fishing easements in 2005. Bank shaping, rip-rap, LUNKERS, and wedge dams have increased the holding areas for trout along this small stream. It may take two years for overall numbers of adult fish to increase in the project area, but it only took two months for the fish now there to utilize the new structures. Habitat work is scheduled to continue for an additional 3,400 feet. Public fishing easements are located along the project area.

Gordon Creek

With just over four miles of public fishing easement, Gordon Creek supports one of the better brown trout fisheries south of Route 18. We have estimated 1,800 brown trout per mile of all sizes from surveys conducted in 2005. With brown trout over 20 inches present, the creek offers anglers the opportunity to catch trophy size fish as well. Habitat improvement projects are scheduled to begin in 2006. Catch and release as well as harvest areas are located on Gordon Creek.

Grant County

Trout: Surveys conducted in 2005 along portions of the Grant and Little Grant River systems reveal that both have an estimated brown trout population of 600 trout per mile. Both also offer anglers the opportunity of trophy fish, with brown trout over 20 inches present. Other streams of interest that anglers may want to try are Borah Creek, McPherson Branch, and the Rountree Branch – all of which have an established brown trout population with public access available.

Smallmouth bass: Environmental conditions in 2005 proved to foster another good reproductive year for smallmouth bass in Grant County. Surveys conducted in the Platte and Grant River basins turned up many young-of-the-year smallmouth bass. Combined with the good year-class of 2003, the 2005 year-class has anglers looking forward to the 2007 and 2008 fishing seasons.

Cam Nelson displays the monster musky he caught and released in 2005 from the Yahara River south of Lake Kegonsa. Photo by Tyler Diettert.

There are still many opportunities for anglers to catch smallmouth 12 to 17 inches. Some streams anglers may want to take a look at include Blockhouse Creek, Rattlesnake Creek, Platte River system, and the Grant River system. Remember that landowner permission is required before walking along the stream banks where public fishing easements are absent.

–Bradd Sims, fisheries biologist, Dodgeville

Dane County

The Madison (Yahara) lakes offer anglers a "one-stop" fishing experience as home to a suite of high quality game and panfish opportunities. Highlights from the 2005 field sampling season follow.

Wingra Lake

The muskellunge population is estimated at 753 fish, or 2.18 adult (over 30 inches) fish per acre. Compared to other "good " musky lakes, this is anywhere between two to four times the average standing stock. We saw relatively good numbers of 9-inch white crappies. Panfish remain numerous but small. Bass numbers are low and size distribution on the small side.

South Central Region
continued

Monona Lake

Our musky population survey in 2004 estimated densities of 0.49 adult fish per acre. Average size and condition are excellent: an average Monona musky is 36 inches and weighs 13 pounds. Bass numbers are highest of any lake on chain: we see fish to 20.3 inches with 14 percent of all largemouth larger than legal size. Walleye are the Monona "sleeper"—the average fish shocked was 16.4 inches and 62 percent of all fish we shock are legal. Bluegill numbers are very high—the catch rate is 265 fish per hour, compared to 52 per hour on neighboring Mendota. We had a very strong year class of 'gills this last year. Perch averaged 7 inches but 20 percent of catch exceeded 9 inches with fish to 10.2 inches. Northern pike were found up to 38 inches in fall 2005 sampling.

Mendota Lake

Walleye stocks showed both excellent young–of- year survival (23 percent) and a high percentage (19 percent) of fish greater than 18 inches. Catch rates were 33 fish per hour—consistent with the four-year average. The largemouth bass sample was dominated by 50 percent of the catch being young-of-the-year or fish less than 7 inches. Fall bluegill samples were inconclusive and non-representative.

Lake Waubesa

Bass catches remain strong with fish up to 21.2 inches. The percent of fish greater than 14 inches (legal size) continues to hover at about 11 percent. Walleye catches were modest, with and average size of 15.3 inches. Fish ranged from 9.3 to 20.6 inches. Fifty percent of all walleye were greater than 15 inches. Panfish were numerous but small.

Lake Kegonsa

A very dominant year-class of yellow bass was evident. Largemouth bass were prolific, especially at the Yahara River mouth and up to AB bridge. 348 bass were sampled; only 8 percent were legal sized or larger. The largest bass was 17.6 inches. Bluegills catch rates were 108 fish per hour, fair to good numbers-wise. Fish were measured up to 9.3 inches. Kegonsa had the best quality (size-wise) of the lakes' samples for panfish. Walleye catches were fair at best, with mostly small fish encountered. However, the 2005 sample excluded the north shore due to weather and this area traditionally provides the best walleye habitat on the lake.

Fish Lake

The most recent survey, 2003, found a good opportunity to catch and release bass under the 18-inch size limit. Abundant milfoil beds allow bluegills to hide from predators, thus they are abundant but don't grow to quality size, although a fair number of 7-inch fish exist. Carp are abundant and nutrient levels from agricultural runoff over the years have decreased water quality. Mud Lake, connected by a road culvert, was noted to contain good populations of quality-size yellow bullheads and 7-9 inch crappie.

Dane County trout streams

Perennial favorites for wild fish include Black Earth Creek, Mt. Vernon creek, and portions of Garfoot and Deer creeks. Newly rehabilitated waters where extensive habitat work was completed include the West Branch Sugar River, Primrose Branch, and German Valley creeks. Dane County also hosts pond and lake fishing opportunities at Stewart Park Lake near Mt. Horeb, Token Creek Ponds east of Waunakee, Salmo Pond near Black Earth, and Kyle and Jenny ponds in Fitchburg.

Dane County streams grass up early making summer fishing more challenging as vegetation drapes the watercourses. Recent bank work has created more fishable conditions by removal of invasive box-elder and woody vegetation.

The focus is on producing wild fish by creating in- stream habitat that supports spawning, nursery, and over winter cover. Fisheries staff stock modest numbers of fingerling trout to supplement natural reproduction in most waters. Yearling domestic strain trout are stocked on popular waters where fishing pressure is heavy.

Dane County experienced at least two runoff related fish kills on trout water since fall 2004. Fisheries management is actively involved in finding solutions to balance the public trust in high quality fisheries with our agricultural heritage.

New maps showing both DNR ownership and public easement along Dane county streams are available from the South Central Regional Office.

–Kurt Welke, fisheries biologist, Fitchburg

Southwest Wisconsin trout streams

The fishing forecast for trout in southwest Wisconsin for trout is nothing short of fantastic. Almost the entire trout fishery is now a wild trout fishery and most of the streams contain multiple year classes of fish. Growth rates have remained good, and because of the significant number of older fish, most streams now contain significant numbers of medium to larger trout. A number of shocker surveys of the catch-and-release streams and stream segments found across the board outstanding trout populations even late in the season. Since these trout are predisposed to survive and reproduce in the wild, they have a thinner, racier build as well as a smaller ultimate size. The adult wild brown trout average 10 to 13 inches with big trout measuring 14, 15 or 16 inches and trophies measuring 17 or 18 inches. Wild trout greater than 18 inches are very scarce.

Lower Wisconsin River

The walleye population has seen a significant increase in 15- to 18-inch fish resulting from protection afforded by the newly established 18-inch size limit. A fair increase in the number of 19-inch and larger fish has also been noted in the surveys. In particular, anglers report the number of medium, and to some extent, larger walleye caught downstream has improved significantly. Channel catfish are currently in good shape. The smallmouth bass population has a good number of fish with a number of medium and larger fish. Almost all of the bass anglers practice catch-and-release almost exclusively and the population is improving to reflect this practice. There was a great hatch of smallmouth bass this year in the river, and while this won't affect the 2006 fishery, it bodes well for future fishing. There are also decent populations of bluegills and crappie located in the river's quiet still water areas.

Iowa County

Blackhawk Lake

The largemouth bass population of Blackhawk Lake has responded positively to the special "No Size Limit" regulation that has been in effect for the past couple of years. The overpopulation of medium bass has been reduced and the current population still consists of good numbers but the fish are much heavier for their body length and there are more large fish. The crappie population remains in pretty good shape for number and size distribution. The population of large bluegills has passed out of the system, replaced by very large numbers of smaller fish. The bait shop, anglers and a co-op DNR project has led to purchasing large young-of-year walleye and stocking them in the lake. A pretty decent bonus walleye population is developing.

Cox Hollow Lake

The special "No Size Limit" regulation in effect for the past couple of years has eliminated the severely stunted population of bass, however, the bluegill fishery remains dominated by medium and larger fish with only limited number of smaller fish. The liberal bass regulation will remain in effect until the number of smaller fish dramatically improves. An experimental DNR program to evaluate the success of stocking large instead of small young-of-year (YOY) walleye has been completed. Stocking large YOY resulted in a significant population of walleye, which never developed when smaller YOY walleyes were stocked. These fish have not made the legal size limit yet but they are surviving well and growing at a modest rate.

Twin Valley Lake

Twin Valley Lake has really seen improvement in the overall quality of its fishery in recent years as result of a number of intensive management efforts. The lake currently has a large population of medium to medium-small bluegill and crappies and there is no limit on harvest in any one day. The largemouth bass population is in excellent shape for numbers and size structure, with the number of large fish increasing every year. The lake has a limited but fair population of walleye of all sizes that have resulted from large YOY walleye being stocked instead of small YOY. The number of musky stocked has been reduced and significant amounts of musky forage have been planted, resulting in more normal catch rates and fish in much better condition and heavier bodied. While not a producer of trophy musky, the number of 36- to 40-inch fish is outstanding for a small lake.

–Gene Van Dyck, fisheries biologist, Dodgeville

Columbia County

Lake Wisconsin/Wisconsin River

Fall 2005 surveys show below-average year-class production for both walleye and sauger. For walleye, it's been 1997 since a major year-class occurred. Sauger have been more stable but less numerous. The positive news for 2006 is a good number of legal-size fish (15 to 19 inches) present, possibly because of lower than normal harvest in 2005. Late ice out prevented angling on the spawning run leaving the lake, and poor catchability of fish after early June in the lake. A very large year-class of shad occurred in 2005 and may have kept walleye well-fed, but the shad population has suffered a typical, late November kill. Thus, the walleye may be more eager to bite in 2006. A record number per mile of fish over 20 inches was also observed, likely aided by the protected 20- to 28-inch no-harvest slot rule. Most of these fish are from low level year-classes. Largemouth and smallmouth bass populations continue to look good and large bluegill are definitely present in the lake, indicating they are not overharvested. A good white bass year-class was noted. Crappie abundance has never regained the level of 10 to15 years ago, but large fish are present. Musky stocking occurs in alternate years and 50-inch fish are occasionally caught.

A fall population estimate of 238 legal size lake sturgeon was determined below the Sauk Dam. With 75 fish harvested during the fall hook and line season, the 30 percent harvest rate is too high to maintain the fishery, thus future harvest will have to be reduced.

Lake Columbia

The annual late fall survey of this 500 acre "hot tub" found the fishery in good shape. Largemouth bass of 14 to 17 inches are at a record high with bass over the 18-inch size limit about average. Though power generation has increased, causing the lake temperature to be warmer for a longer period, smallmouth bass continue to maintain a presence. Annual hybrid striper stocking is funded by Alliant Utility and fish of all sizes continue to be present. The largest sample this year was 27 inches and 9 pounds. Channel catfish numbers are down about 50 percent over the past few years, possibly due to increasing numbers of flatheads, ranging up to 40 inches.

Swan and Park lakes

These two upper impoundments of the Fox River continue to be plagued by overabundant gizzard shad. Superstocking of walleye in Park Lake has been tried for the past three years, but the young shad outgrow young walleye during the first year, so predation is not effective until walleye reach year two. The once abundant aquatic vegetation with its excellent bluegill and bass fishery has been replaced by shad and current populations of stocked walleye and northern pike. Nutrient runoff from the watershed over the years is to blame.

The shad in Swan Lake out-compete stocked walleye fry for zooplankton, thus a switch was made to small fingerling stocking. They have been noted to survive better and will provide a continued walleye fishery. Largemouth and smallmouth bass, crappie, bluegill, yellow bass and catfish round out the fishery.

Sauk County

Devils Lake

The two-story brown trout fishery continues to grow in popularity. About 15 percent of the catch is comprised of 2-year-old trout (14 to 17 inches). Stocked at 9 inches in April, they grew to 12 inches the following fall. Many anglers are enjoying ice fishing for the trout using fathead minnows. The lake touts a trophy northern pike fishery with its 32-inch size limit. Largemouth, smallmouth bass and jumbo bluegills are also present. Only electric motors are allowed.

Lake Redstone

Crappie fishing is popular during the spawning period. Walleye stocking continues to fuel a quality fishery. Good numbers up to 20 inches are noted. Smallmouth bass stocking in 1998 and 1999 by a local club has now established a natural reproducing population. The lake has also become known for musky with several legal fish noted. Good size structure of largemouth bass, channel catfish and bluegill round out the fishery.

White Mound Lake

A drawdown in winter 2003-04 to remove sediment in the two bays will optimize bass predation as the dredging will reduce milfoil vegetation which provided hiding cover for small bluegills. It is on its way to returning to its quality bluegill status of the 90s.

Lake Virginia

A drawdown during fall and winter 2003-04 to allow for replacement of the outlet structure led to compaction of sediment, which should help reduce the dense vegetation for a while. Restocking with bass and bluegill occurred during 2004 and the fishery is developing as scheduled. The Lake District installed a new aeration system, which will prevent any future fish kills.

Mirror Lake

The 137-acre State Park impoundment continues to support an excellent largemouth bass population. Native northern pike are also present and a stocked walleye fishery exists. Bluegill, black crappie and yellow perch provide plenty of action as well.

Lake Delton

Excellent fishing is found when boating and other water activity on this Lake Delton playground tapers off in the fall or early spring and during early morning and evening. A good largemouth bass population, stocked walleye and spillover northern pike from Mirror Lake offer outstanding action. The lake has shad forage, which allows for good growth. Bluegill, crappie and yellow bass provide panfishing.

Sauk and Columbia county trout streams

Stocking of wild strain trout has been documented to provide two to three times better survival in trout streams. About 80 percent of the streams are stocked. The better streams in Columbia County are Rowan, Rocky Run, Jennings and Lodi, while in Sauk County, try Dell, Rowley and Manley for native brookies. Recent habitat work has been conducted on Honey Creek in western Sauk County and is showing good response.

Kids Fishing Ponds

During late May and early June the following ponds receive a planting of panfish by local sportsmen's clubs. Try Plenke Pond in Reedsburg, Deppe Pond in Baraboo and Pauquette Pond at Portage. Fishing clinics and contests are offered by local clubs.

–Tim Larson, fisheries biologist, Poynette

Dodge County

Beaver Dam Lake

2005 spring fyke netting indicated that the size distribution of walleye has shifted with several additional year classes present under the new 18-inch minimum length limit/ three fish daily bag. Growth rates of walleye continue to be good for southern Wisconsin, with females reaching 18 inches in an average of five years, and males in seven

DNR fish biologist Laura Stremick-Thompson shows off a nice walleye captured during fall surveys on Fox Lake, Dodge County.

years. DNR stocked 1,870,000 walleye fry into Beaver Dam Lake in 2005. The majority (74 percent) of bluegill sampled during 2005 spring fyke netting were 7 to 8 inches, while 95 percent of yellow perch sampled were between 7.5 and 10 inches.

Fox Lake

Walleye catch rates for 2005 fall electrofishing were 86.5 per hour, comparable to 2004 rates. The number of young-of-the-year (YOY) walleye under 10 inches was 5.3 per hour, a drop from 11.5 per hour in 2004. In 2005, DNR stocked 129,850 small fingerling walleye into Fox Lake. Catch rates of largemouth bass were much higher (87.4 per hour) than in 2004, due to the abundance of small bass, most likely due to the spawning and rearing habitat provided by the abundant growth of submerged aquatic plants in summer 2005. The lake also experienced clearer water in summer 2005, aiding development of the excellent plant habitat. Anglers should continue to experience good crappie fishing on Fox Lake, with 2005 fall electrofishing sampling black crappies up to 12 inches. The majority of yellow perch measured during fall electrofishing were 7 to 8 inches, and 43 percent of bluegill measured were 5 to 6 inches.

Jefferson County

Rock Lake

Fall electrofishing in 2005 produced largemouth bass up to 16.5 inches and smallmouth bass up to 16.4 inches. Despite the stocking of 499,200 walleye fry in 2005, the walleye population continues to struggle, with fall electrofishing catch rates remaining consistently low at 4.2 per hour, and fish ranging from 7.8 to 20.4 inches. Bluegills up to 9.2 inches and yellow perch up to 10.4 inches were sampled. Rock bass were the second-most abundant panfish species, at 53 fish per hour and up to 11.5 inches.

Rock River

In November 2005, a fish passage structure was installed at the Jefferson Dam in the City of Jefferson. (See story page 5) and is providing fish 40 miles of uninterrupted river access from the Indianford dam at Lake Koshkonong to the lower Watertown dam.

–Laura Stremick-Thompson, fisheries biologist, Horicon

Southeast Region

Southern Lake Michigan

Chinook fishing has been very good, with many fish in 2005 12 to 18 pounds reported. The forage base in Lake Michigan is declining and may have had an impact on the Chinook growth rates, so Wisconsin will reduce Chinook stocking by 21 percent, or about 300,000 fish, beginning in 2006 as its share of a lakewide stocking reduction agreed to by states surrounding Lake Michigan.

In spring 2005, coho were abundant but relatively small. As summer wore on, 8 or 9 pound fish became more common. Coho fishing is expected to be as good or better in 2006. Wisconsin's Lake Michigan coho fishery begins in the south (Kenosha and Racine) in April and May and gradually moves north as water temperatures rise, typically reaching Milwaukee in May and Port Washington and Sheboygan by June.

Steelhead catches in recent years have been average at best. Because of the excellent chinook fishing close to shore, anglers haven't been as inclined to search for steelhead out in deeper water.

Nearshore fishing

Shore anglers enjoyed some good fishing in July and August working harbors and river mouths for Skamania steelhead. These fish are staging in anticipation of their early fall spawning run. The Chambers Creek and Ganaraska strains should also provide some action for anglers in late winter and early spring.

In recent years two additional rainbow trout strains have been stocked on an experimental basis to augment the near-shore fishery. (See story page 3). The Arlee strain has been stocked since 2001 along with the Kamloops strain since 2003, and the Arlees are showing up in anglers' creels.

Brown trout fishing was good in spring and fall 2005. Browns provide a consistent nearshore fishery during the cold months, especially at warm-water discharges and near river mouths. We see dependable returns on domestic brown trout, while the fast-growing, hard-fighting Seeforellen strain continues to add excitement to the brown trout fishery.

Although the yellow perch population in Lake Michigan continues to be depressed, fishing from the piers and shore was very good at times in spring and summer 2005. The 1998 year-class still supports a large percentage of the harvest, but the 2001 and 2002 year-classes are contributing substantially to the catches as well. Perch fishing remains closed from May 1 through June 15 to protect mature females before spawning.

Many of our harbors have seen habitat improvements over the last decade, which has translated into increasing naturally reproducing populations of smallmouth bass and northern pike, two species native to Lake Michigan. Walleye will be stocked in the Milwaukee River through 2009 as part of the Milwaukee River Estuary Walleye Management Plan. The walleye have shown good survival and high growth rates.

Tributary fishing

Spring and fall steelhead runs have not been strong in recent years. Anglers can generally look for Skamania as water temperatures start to cool in mid-September. Chambers Creek usually follow in late fall and can be found through March and early April. Ganaraska Strain enter the streams as early as late November and December and again from late March through April.

As always, the tributary fishery depends on water temperature and flow conditions, which triggers the upstream migration of salmonids. If flow conditions improve in 2006, we expect a good tributary fishery.

For up-to-date fishing information, call the Southern Lake Michigan Fishing Hotline at 414-382-7920. For information about our Lake Michigan program visit *www.fishingwisconsin.org* then look under "Fisheries Program" to find "Lake Michigan."

– Pradeep Hirethota and Cheryl Peterson, Southern Lake Michigan fisheries, Milwaukee

Waukesha County

Pine Lake

We conducted a comprehensive fish survey on Pine Lake in Spring, 2005 and preliminary results reveal a good walleye density of about 3.4 adults per acre—compared to 2 per acre, more typical of most Waukesha County lakes. Pine Lake has a naturally reproducing walleye population that is supplemented by DNR stocking in odd-numbered years.

An ongoing year-long creel survey will help determine angler success in catching and harvesting walleyes, bass, northern pike and panfish. To aid this effort, thousands of game fish and bluegills were tagged with thin, barrel-shaped, yellow plastic tags. Anglers who harvest a fish with a tag are asked to return the tag to the DNR, along with information on the length and weight of the fish harvested.

Oconomowoc River

The treatment of a 7-mile stretch of the Oconomowoc River with rotenone to eliminate the carp is already paying off in "keeper sized" bass, northerns and panfish. (See story page 6).

Muskellunge: Waukesha County has several lakes where musky hunters can pursue their quarry. DNR stocks Okauchee and Pewaukee, but muskies like to travel, and you will now find fishable musky populations in Oconomowoc, Fowler, Lac La Belle, North and even Pine Lake.

In fall 2005, Muskies, Inc. and Muskellunge Club of Wisconsin teamed up and purchased 450 Leech Lake (Minnesota)strain muskies and stocked them into Okauchee Lake. These muskies were marked with a fin clip so they can be differentiated from those stocked from the state hatcheries. DNR will evaluate the performance of these fish with future surveys.

Walleye: Each year DNR stocks between 200,000 and 300,000 walleye fingerlings in 17 lakes in alternate years, with about half stocked in even-numbered years and half in odd-numbered years. Recent surveys have shown excellent survival of stocked walleyes with development of good size and age structure in the population. Some of the more popular Waukesha County walleye lakes include Lac La Belle, Oconomowoc, Pine, Nagawicka and Little Muskego.

Bass: Many Waukesha County lakes have both largemouth and smallmouth bass, although one species tends to predominate. If you want to fish mainly for smallmouth, try Oconomowoc Lake; if largemouth is your favorite, try Golden Lake. Largemouth and smallmouth bass are not currently stocked, and bass are managed by protecting and enhancing habitat for spawning and feeding. Recent surveys have found bass populations to be good. Our warm, southern Wisconsin waters provide excellent growth. Smallmouth up to 5 pounds and largemouth up to 7 pounds have been caught in fisheries surveys and by anglers in the right place at the right time. Other good lakes to seek smallmouth are Nagawicka, Okauchee and Pine. Good bets for largemouth are Keesus, Denoon and Big Muskego.

–Susan Beyler, senior fisheries biologist, Waukesha

Milwaukee River Drainage and the Metro Area

Located in the heart of downtown Milwaukee, fishing opportunities for coldwater and coolwater gamefish have greatly improved in the Milwaukee River Estuary. (See story page 6). Exceptional brown trout fishing can be found starting in fall and lasting all winter along the Menomonee River portion of the estuary. There, anglers have a good chance of landing a huge northern pike, along with walleye and smallmouth bass attracted by a warmwater discharge and large gizzard shad forage base. Don't forget a long handled landing net!

With removal of the North Avenue Dam on the Milwaukee River in 1997, anglers have good access to spring and fall runs of rainbow and brown trout and fall runs of coho and chinook salmon. Under all but drought conditions, these fish can make their way 21 miles upstream to the Thiensville Dam in Ozaukee County where good public access exists for anglers who want to wade or fish from shore. Under higher flow conditions, trout and salmon have been taken as far upstream as the Village of Grafton's Lime Kiln Dam and park in Ozaukee County.

Smallmouth bass fishing in the Milwaukee River should rebound after last year's severe drought and low stream flows. While smallmouth numbers are high, they continue to run rather small. Anglers should expect to encounter an occasional walleye from the lower Milwaukee River. Almost all Milwaukee River walleyes are stocked fish. Since we are hoping to establish walleye natural reproduction, anglers are encouraged to practice catch and release on these stocked walleyes. First stocked in 1995, these walleyes continue to grow at above average rates. 2006 will find us partnering with the Environmental Protection Agency, Walleyes for Tomorrow and the US Fish and Wildlife Service in conducting a fish habitat restoration project along the Milwaukee River immediately downstream of the former North Avenue Dam. This project will provide rubble spawning habitat for walleyes.

–William Wawryzn, senior fisheries biologist, Milwaukee

Sheboygan County

The Onion River and its tributaries should be the highlight of trout fishing opportunities in the entire southeastern region. Special regulations put in place in 2004 on all Onion River watershed streams upstream of County E are really paying off. Some anglers said they caught more trout on a typical day in the special regulation sections of the Onion River than they normally catch on some of the best southwestern Wisconsin streams. Many areas upstream of County Highway E are open enough now to allow fly fishing. Wisconsin DNR and Lakeshore Chapter – Trout Unlimited combined efforts over the past five years to greatly improve the habitat and fishability of the stream. The trout population is entirely wild brown trout since habitat restoration has greatly increased natural reproduction.

Smallmouth bass fishing on the Sheboygan and Mullet rivers should be very good, especially the Sheboygan River downstream of State Highway 23 and the Mullet River upstream from Sheboygan Falls.

Fish survey work at Crystal Lake indicates that the largemouth bass population is holding up well and providing very good fishing opportunities. The panfish population appeared to be somewhat depressed from the past but should return when water levels return to normal.

Panfish action at the "South Ditch" area of Sheboygan Marsh has been fantastic at times. DNR crews transferred almost 30,000 panfish from Eagle and Vern Wolf Lakes to the Marsh in recent years and those fish provided very good action, especially during the winter fishery. The panfish grow very quickly when stocked into the Marsh.

Musky action at Big Elkhart and Random lakes has been very good at times over the past five years. Random Lake has been best in the early season while Elkhart action has been relatively steady.

Washington County

DNR's fish survey of Big Cedar Lake in 2005 indicated that the northern pike population is beginning to rebound. A 40-inch minimum size limit enacted several years ago seems to be working. We found more yearling pike in the lake in 2005 than observed in the recent past and anglers are beginning to report catching many more small pike. Anglers in 2005 also said they caught more and bigger largemouth bass and some limits of nice bluegills and perch. The adult walleye population was somewhat down due probably to poor success from stocking but recent stocking may have been more successful as a fair number of small walleye were observed

Pike Lake continues to be the best walleye lake in Washington County due entirely to natural reproduction. An electrofishing survey in fall of 2004 confirmed that the adult population of walleye remains in good shape. However, few small walleye were captured during that survey. Perch, bluegill and largemouth bass action has been very good at the lake at times.

Smallmouth bass fishing has reportedly been very good on the Milwaukee River in West Bend and downstream in recent years, with anglers catching 30 or more smallmouth bass in an evening.

Significant improvements in water quality and dam removals have increased naturally reproducing populations of northern pike and smallmouth bass in Lake Michigan harbors. Here, Tom Burzynski, DNR Lake Michigan fisheries technican, shows off a nice pike caught in the Milwaukee harbor. Photo by Cheryl Peterson.

Southeast Region
continued

Fond du Lac County

Long Lake near Dundee is one of the best overall lake fisheries in the general area. A comprehensive fish survey of the lake in 2004 confirmed that the lake holds the best largemouth bass population of any lake in the area. A high percentage of the bass were of legal size or larger. The panfish fishery of Long Lake fluctuates considerably due to very heavy fishing pressure, especially in winter. Northern pike were abundant in the lake according to the survey but, most were below the 26-inch minimum size limit.
–John Nelson, senior fisheries biologist, Plymouth

Walworth County

Baseline fish surveys showed both the Lauderdale chain of lakes and Lake Beulah support large numbers of bass. Most are less than 14 inches long but 18+ inch bass do swim these waters. In cooperation with the Lauderdale Lakes Improvement Association, we stocked 51,424 smallmouth bass fingerlings into the chain between 2001 and 2005. Some of these fish are showing up in fall surveys and growth rates are very good, with some approaching the legal size limit of 14 inches.

Delavan Lake

Still greatly benefiting from the 1990 lake restoration project, 2,500 acre Delavan Lake continues to support excellent largemouth bass and smallmouth bass populations. The minimum size limit of 18 inches has created above-average size structure. Our walleye stocking program, along with special fishing regulations, has created an excellent walleye fishery with many walleyes exceeding the minimum size limit. Northern pike reproduce naturally in this lake and survival and growth are excellent. Bluegills dominate the panfish community and size structure is above average. Our fish survey crews see many 'gills between 7 and 8 inches long and some even larger. We stock about 2,500 muskellunge into Delavan Lake annually. Fish survey crews have collected musky up to 48 inches long. We plan on stocking two strains of musky in 2006 as part of a study to compare survival and growth between muskies originating from Wisconsin and stocks from elsewhere.

Turtle Lake

Our fish surveys turned up bass up to 18 inches long. Bluegills are abundant with some up to 8 inches long. The Turtle Lake Sportsmen's Club has stocked walleye fingerlings into this lake and fish surveys have collected walleyes up to 18 inches long.

Geneva Lake

A perennial favorite, 5,000 acre Geneva Lake supports excellent largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, northern pike, and walleye populations. Geneva gets stocked with walleyes every other year, and lake trout and brown trout annually. Gamefish in this lake feed on abundant mimic shiners and growth rates are excellent. Black crappie grow big here, and yellow perch numbers are up.

Racine County

Browns Lake

A fall 2005 fish survey collected bass at the excellent rate of 86 per hour. Most were 13 to 15 inches long with a few greater than 16 inches. Browns received 103,920 walleye fingerlings between 2002 and 2005. Some of these fish have showed up in fall electrofishing surveys. Growth rates are excellent and several walleyes between 16 and 18 inches long were collected. Browns Lake is a good bet for anglers wanting a lot of action catching northern pike. Northerns were caught at the rate of 20 per hour during fall 2005 electrofishing and ranged between 17 and 32 inches.

Rockdale Lake

A good choice for largemouth bass, this carry-in lake is undeveloped and provides an aesthetically pleasing fishing experience. The 12-16 inch slot size limit means anglers can harvest bass under 12 inches and over 16 inches. Tichigan and Wind lakes are both stocked with walleyes in alternate years.

Kenosha County

Special fishing regulations and an extensive stocking program on Silver Lake will attract anglers again in 2006. 23,000 walleyes are stocked every other year, and 1,000 muskellunge are stocked annually. Fish surveys have sampled muskies up to 47 inches long. DNR fish surveys on the Fox River in 2005 collected smallmouth bass, white bass, yellow bass, and channel catfish.
–Doug Welch, senior fisheries biologist, Sturtevant

West Central Region

Mississippi River (Grant, Crawford, Vernon, & La Crosse counties)

Walleye populations remain high in Mississippi River Pool 9 near Genoa and Pool 10 near Praire du Chien. DNR fall 2005 electrofishing surveys continued to show that this natural reproducing system is very productive. Catch-per-unit-effort (CPE) for adult walleye in Pool 9 was up from 2003 to 240 fish per hour with the majority of fish 11 to 28 inches. In Pool 10, CPE for adult walleye was also higher to 120 fish per hour with the majority of fish 11 to 25 inches. Young-of-year (YOY) surveys show a good year-class of walleye, with a catch rate in Pool 8 of 207 fish per hour, above the longterm average of 119 walleye. In Pool 10, the catch rate was down slightly from the longterm average.

Two habitat rehabilitation and enhancement projects recently completed near Ambro Slough in Pool 10 and Sunfish Lake in Pool 1l have greatly improved available overwintering habitat for many fish species. Electrofishing surveys conducted in Tilmont, Big Missouri, Spring, and Upper Doubles Lakes (Pool 10) and Sunfish Lake (Pool 11) showed good populations of black and white crappie 9 to13 inches, bluegill 5 to 9 inches, yellow perch 6 to 12-inches, and largemouth bass 10 to 19 inches. These efforts to enhance and rehabilitate degraded backwater areas in the Mississippi River will ultimately provide year-round fishing opportunities for generations.
–Patrick Short, fisheries biologist, Prairie du Chien

Marathon and Portage counties

Lake Wausau

We surveyed Lake Wausau in 2005 and compared it to the 1995 survey before the new walleye regulation—a minimum size limit of 15 inches, no fish may be kept between 20 and 28 inches, and only one fish 28 inches or greater may be kept on the Wisconsin River from Grandfather Dam near Merrill to the Prairie du Sac Dam. Results were comparable or better than in 1995. Walleye per net night increased from 0.6 in 1995 to 1.4 in 2005, with much of the increase due to more fish 20 inches and larger. We also noted a 10 percent decrease in annual mortality which was likely due to reduced angler harvest of fish greater than 20 inches. Another positive was the capture of five walleye 27 to 29 inches long compared to only two in 1995. The northern pike population is better than ever. Even though catch decreased slightly, there's a larger percentage of fish over 21 inches than in 1995. Another important change has been the increase in musky, with catch up from 0.02 to 0.11 fish per net night, with fish ranging from 9.2 to 46 inches. Largemouth and smallmouth bass numbers are stable, as are panfish. Black crappie stock density has remained about the same for fish 8 inches and greater, but the maximum size captured increased from 10.8 inches to 13.4 inches. Density of bluegill 6 inches and greater has decreased slightly but the catch was strong and the maximum size has remained about the same at 8.9 inches. Anglers also report channel catfish of various sizes are caught regularly.

Lake DuBay (Marathon/Portage County)

We surveyed the DuBay Flowage in 2003 and estimated one walleye per acre 15 inches or greater, exceeding nearby Big Eau Pleine Flowage, which produced 0.8 fish per acre at that size. We captured 157 smallmouth bass, 99 percent of which were greater than 11 inches, with about 36 percent 14 inches or more. Northern pike were a major component of the catch, with 40 percent of those sampled 21 inches or more. About 15 percent were 26 inches or greater and 4 percent of were 32 inches or larger. This compares favorably to the Big Eau Pleine Flowage in 2003 where 3 percent of the pike were 32 inches or greater. The largest pike collected was 44.5 inches and the flowage appears to have outstanding growth potential. Lake DuBay has been a reference lake for our northern pike regulation studies. Panfish populations were excellent: 67 percent of bluegill were 6 inches or greater; 69 percent of black crappie were 8 inches or greater, and 40 percent of yellow perch were 8 inches or more. For angler preferred sizes, 15 percent of bluegill were 8 inches or more, 12 percent of black crappie were 12 inches or more, and 7 percent of yellow perch were 10 inches or more.

Wisconsin River

Smallmouth bass was the most common species captured during a 2005 electrofishing survey, and comprised 67 percent of the catch from the combined five survey sites. The highest catch occurred below the Stevens Point Dam, where a rate of 60 fish per hour was observed, followed by catches below DuBay Dam (42 per hour), then below Rothschild Dam (29 fish per hour), below Whiting Dam (13.7 fish per hour), and at Brokaw. Smallmouth ranged from 4 to 18.1 inches and averaged 11.2 inches.

Channel catfish were second in abundance at 13 percent of the total catch, with the greatest catch below Stevens Point Dam, followed by below Rothschild Dam, and below DuBay Dam. A channel catfish hoop net study completed in summer 2005 also indicated the greatest abundance below Stevens Point Dam, with 54 fish per net night, and the largest catfish were captured below DuBay Dam, with sizes ranging from 14.7 to 30.5 inches and averaging 22.2 inches. Average sizes below Whiting and Stevens Point Dams were 18.4 and 15.4, respectively. Anglers should target the Stevens Point Flowage and upriver for larger catfish and below Stevens Point Dam for higher catch rates.

Improvements in land uses, coupled with DNR's aggressive restoration of habitat and its wild trout stocking program, have added 325 miles of new or improved trout waters in La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford and Monroe counties since 1995. Another 50 miles are expected to be identified in 2006 through stream inventory surveys like this one done in 2005 by Dave Vetrano, Dean Edlin and Mark Endris in 2006. Photo by Jordan Weeks.

Walleye were 11 percent of total catch with sizes ranging from 6 to 25 inches, and averaging 10.5 inches. Catch rates were highest below Stevens Point Dam (10.8 per hour), followed by DuBay Dam (6 per hour), with catches about 3 per hour below Whiting, Rothschild, and Brokaw. This likely indicates good numbers coming from the 2004 year-class, throughout the river.

Lake Sturgeon restoration is continuing in the river and in 2005 we stocked 10,000 fingerlings and 1,000 yearling sturgeon. We also initiated a population status survey using electrofishing in the reach below DuBay Dam and captured nine lake sturgeon ranging in size from 26.9 to 36 inches. Anglers are reminded there is no open season for lake sturgeon on the Wisconsin River above Wisconsin Dells.

Portage County trout streams

Habitat was created in 2005 on the Tomorrow River above Nelsonville and below Amherst. (See story page 6). This new habitat and a section completed at the Waupaca County line in 2003 should give stocked and resident fish plenty of hiding places and hopefully enhance the population for the future.

Most major Portage County trout streams were surveyed in 2005. Even with low water levels the trout populations were in good health. Surveys on the Tomorrow River provided estimates of 924 brown trout per mile upstream from Nelsonville with about 20 percent within the harvest slot and 1,699 per mile at Nelsonville with about 20 percent within the harvest slot and a few fish harvestable above 20 inches. The population level was similar to 2004, but two to three times greater than that observed 10 years ago in these reaches. Brook trout were estimated at 196 per mile upstream from Nelsonville and about 156 per mile at Nelsonville, but few brook trout were captured within the harvest slot. Ten years ago the same areas held about 400 brook trout per mile, brook trout numbers have decreased by about half since that time. We surveyed three sections of Flume Creek in 2005 from below Rosholt to Northland; brook trout dominated the catch, averaging 700 brook trout per mile with about 7 percent above the 9-inch minimum size. We also surveyed Emmons Creek upstream and downstream from Stratton Lake Road and estimate about 2,700 brown trout per mile. About 12 to 15 percent were at or above the 9-inch minimum.
–Tom Meronek, fisheries biologist, Wausau

Petenwell and Castle Rock flowages

Central Wisconsin's inland seas, the Petenwell and Castle Rock flowages, provide the most consistent and varied fishing opportunities in the area. Boaters are reminded to take precautions, so as not to transfer the zebra mussels, because once they have been introduced to new water, there is nothing that can be done to control them.

White Bass: This past summer we've seen a virtual explosion of young-of-the-year white bass in both flowages, the strongest year-class in many years. The white bass are so dense that in 2005 they were a nuisance to anglers, but they are providing excellent forage for walleye and northern pike. The abundance of food may result in reduced catch rates of walleye and northern pike. But the strong year-class will be good news to the angler fishing the "white bass runs" in May 2006 and 2007. Anglers should remember that white bass are listed on the PCB Fish Consumption Advisory.

Musky: Unfortunately, there is no natural reproduction of muskies so the population is 100 percent dependent upon the stocking efforts of DNR and private organizations. Muskies are very expensive to stock and the large acreage of these flowages makes it impossible to stock enough muskies to reach the biologic carrying capacity.

In 2006, muskie anglers will begin to see the benefits of the new 45-inch size limit. As time goes on, there will be increasingly more and larger muskies available. Netting surveys have resulted in .29 muskies per net, ranging in size from 11.7 to 47.1 inches with 36 percent of the muskies smaller than 34 inches, the old size limit, and 64 percent larger. The most revealing statistic was that under the old size limit, only 7 percent of the muskies surveyed reached 45 inches.

Walleye: The walleye population has excellent natural reproduction and growth rates that exceed statewide averages.

Netting surveys average 1.6 walleyes per net, ranging in size from 6 to 27.4 inches. About 58 percent of the walleyes captured were under the 15-inch size limit and protected, with 34 percent in the harvest slot between 15 and 20 inches. 8 percent of those captured were between 20 and 28 inches and protected.

Anglers should expect similar walleye fishing in 2006, but the huge white bass population may make it more difficult to catch walleyes until white bass grow large enough to be no longer suitable forage.

Lake sturgeon: We continue efforts to re-establish a self sustaining population of lake sturgeon throughout the Wisconsin River. (See story page 5).

Adams County

Sherwood Lake

Electrofishing surveys completed in May 2000 and April 2002 provide comparisons of largemouth bass and walleye populations captured in the two surveys.

Largemouth: Largemouth bass are naturally reproducing at adequate levels to maintain the population, therefore stocking is not necessary. The 2002 survey captured 49 largemouth bass per hour, bass ranged from 5.5 to 19 inches and averaged 12 inches. The 2000 survey captured 44.4 largemouth bass ranging from 4 to 20.4 inches with the average at 11.5 inches.

Walleye: Natural reproduction of walleye does not occur to any significant degree and so depends on stocking by DNR as well as the Lake Association. The 2002 survey captured 20 walleyes per hour of shocking ranging from 7.5 to 23 inches, with the average 14.1 inches. The 2000 survey captured 21.3 walleyes ranged from 5.5 to 27 inches and averaging 12.5 inches.

–Scot Ironside, fisheries biologist, Friendship

Chippewa County

Otter Lake

Aeration systems are operated and maintained through a joint effort between Chippewa County, the Otter Lake Booster Club, the Town of Colburn and DNR. A 2005 fish survey found high quality populations of largemouth bass, walleye and northern pike. Our survey found 34 percent of the bass catch was greater than the 14-inch minimum size limit. The lake has a low density, adult walleye population (0.7 fish per acre) which depends on stocking every other year but is undoubtedly one of the best in the county. Eighty percent of the walleyes over the 15-inch minimum size limit (207 fish) were 20 inches or larger. Female walleyes averaged 24.9 inches while males averaged 19.6 inches. The average walleye captured was a 9-year-old but we found a 21-year old male (24.4 inches) and a 20-year old female (27.8 inches). Northern pike have a low density population (0.3 fish per acre) but their size structure is also exceptional. During the spawning run, 68 percent of our catch was 26 inches and larger and 41 percent was 30 inches and larger. Female northern pike averaged 31.4 inches while males averaged 22.5 inches.

Cornell Lake

A 2005 survey by DNR and the Chippewa Valley Outdoor Resource Alliance documented a low density remnant population of walleye. Most adult fish captured during the spawning run represented year classes from the last two stockings of the lake in 1992 and 1995. The survey showed some natural reproduction of walleye from 1996 to 2000, but spawning habitat in the lake is very limited. Size of the walleyes was exceptional, with females averaging 25.1 inches and males 20.1 inches. The average age of walleye captured was 10 years. Before 1963, the lake had been stocked regularly with walleyes, but since then has only been stocked sporadically. Based on the results of this survey, walleyes will once again be stocked every other year. In August 2005, 9,800 surplus fingerlings from our hatchery system were stocked in the lake.

Lake Hallie

In June 2005, a dedication was held for the opening of a handicapped-accessible shoreline fishing facility, completing a 10-year effort to reconstruct the dam and improve access to a very popular, family fishing lake between Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire. The Lake Hallie Lake Association, along with the Village of Lake Hallie and DNR, developed a 571-foot long shoreline fishing area complete with park benches, several accessible picnic tables and a small overhanging fishing pier for individuals who may have a difficult time casting.

Lake Wissota

With the installation of 26 log fish cribs in 2005, the Chippewa Rod and Gun Club has placed 584 log cribs in the lake since 1981. For a flowage nearing its 90th year, these fish cribs provide valuable habitat where structure is lacking. In 2004, the club started to place half-log structures for smallmouth bass nesting, and in 2005 started their first rock reef installation. The club will continue to install fish cribs and will expand on their half-log and rock reef installations. With the elimination of annual winter drawdowns, aquatic vegetation is rebounding and bluegills and other panfish have responded well to this increased habitat. On a negative note, Eurasian water-milfoil was discovered in 2005. DNR is stressing that boaters remove all vegetation from their boats, motors and trailers before leaving the boat landing to prevent the spread of this exotic species to other area lakes.

McCann Creek

Habitat improvements to the creek were done in 2001 and 2002. and a survey conducted in 2005 showed that trout have responded positively. (See story on page 5).

Hay Creek

The stocking of brown trout in Hay Creek was eliminated in 1998 to protect and enhance a native brook trout population. Our survey in 2004 showed that the population of brook trout has more than doubled from 211 per mile in 1995 to 542 per mile. Our 2004 survey found 27 percent of the catch was over the minimum size limit.

–Joe Kurz, fisheries biologist, Chippewa Falls

St. Croix, Pierce, Dunn and Pepin county trout streams

The 2006 season is projected to be another outstanding season.ºSome of the best trout streams in this area with high trout densities and excellent fishability include the Rush River, Kinnickinic River, Plum Creek, the lower Trimbelle River, Isabelle Creek, Cady Creek, Lost Creek, lower Elk Creek and the headwater sections of the South Fork of the Hay River. Annual monitoring of trout populations throughout the four-county area show natural reproduction of brook and brown trout down significantly in 2005, most likely due to lack of rainfall in fall 2004 and late winter floods that imperiled emerging trout fry. Annual fluctuations in trout reproduction are common and not a concern unless several consecutive years of weak reproduction occur. Trout reproduction had been excellent before 2005 so yearling and adult trout densities are in great shape for 2006.

Rush and Kinnickinnic rivers

Fish surveys conducted during summer 2000 and 2005 show phenomenal trout densities and excellent size structure. Brown trout densities (4 inches and larger) throughout the 25 miles averaged 5,000 fish per mile, with densities in prime locations reaching 8,000 fish per mile with 800 per mile over 12 inches. Growth rates, however, have slowed primarily due to colder water temperatures, reductions in forage fish and substantial gains in natural reproduction. Studies on the Rush are under way to determine whether brown trout stocking can be reduced or eliminated altogether. Coldwater investigations on the Kinnickinnic also show extremely high brown trout densities of 5-8,000 fish per mile. throughout most of the 25 miles of stream. Anglers are encouraged to harvest a limit of trout under 10 inches.

Restoring native brook trout streams has been a high priority for the DNR. Just recently, our trout crew completed restoration of the lower 3 miles of Cady Creek in Pierce County. This wild brook trout stream had trout densities averaging less than 500 per mile during the early 1990s and today, several years after restoration, densities average 4,000 to 5,000 trout per mile.

Gilbert Creek

In Dunn County, anglers are already enjoying stretches of the newly improved brook trout water. However, trout populations will need several more years to reach their full potential. (See story page 1).

Tiffany Creek

Another brook trout stream restoration initiative began during spring 2005 on the headwaters of Tiffany Creek in St. Croix County, which had been impounded, then ditched, and suffered from severe bank erosion. Over half-mile of stream was restored through the St. Croix County fairgrounds and we anticipate major improvements in trout reproduction and size distribution over the next several years.

Budget cuts led to no stocking of legal sized trout on most waters during the 2004 and 2005 seasons but the recent increase in license fees and no unforeseen problems in our hatchery system mean stocking of legal-sized trout will resume on waters including: the South Fork of the Hay River near Boyceville, Lower Pine Creek near Ridgeland, Otter Creek near Wheeler, Bolen Creek near Connersville, Eighteen Mile Creek in Colfax, downstream segments of Wilson and Gilbert Creeks near Menomonie, Bear Creek near Durand, Arkansaw Creek in the Village of Arkansaw, the Apple River in Star Prairie and the Willow River upstream of New Richmond and in the state park near Hudson. Perch Lake, a two-story fishery just south of Somerset, also will be stocked.

St. Croix, Pierce, Dunn and Pepin county lakes

Area lakes can provide fast panfish action at ice out, during spawning periods and early ice. Bass and Squaw Lake in St. Croix County are consistent producers. Lake Menomin in Dunn County and Nugget Lake in Pierce County have lower densities, but exceptional quality. Panfish populations can easily be overharvested near large population centers where fishing pressure is high. Several years ago, we began a project to evaluate the effectiveness of a reduced panfish bag limit to improve the panfish size structure in Squaw Lake in St. Croix County, and Thompson Lake in Pepin County. Fish surveys conducted in spring 2005 show promising results on Squaw Lake where fishing pressure has historically reached 475 hours per acre. During 1996, bluegill electrofishing catch rates exceeded 70 fish per mile over 7 inches. By 2003, catch rates had declined to16 fish per mile over 7 inches. By 2005, one year after the regulation change, Squaw Lake electrofishing catch rates had increased to 37 bluegill per mile over 7 inches. These results are promising, but further fish surveys are needed to determine whether the reduced bag limit is working.

The New Richmond Flowage dam was repaired and refilled during 1997; restocking started in 1998, and anglers today find nice catches of largemouth bass, northern pike, perch and crappie. Hatfield Lake, also in New Richmond, suffered from poor oxygen levels during winter which limited sportfish development. In cooperation with the city of New Richmond and the Willow River Rod & Gun Club the lake was rehabilitated by aeration and stocking in fall of 2001. Jumbo perch action was hot during the winters of 2004 and 2005. We anticipate other species such as northern pike, bass and bluegill to pick up during the 2006.

Walleye assessments were conducted during the spring and fall of 2005 on several area lakes. We sampled 973 walleye in Lake Menomin which ranged up to 29 inches. The majority of fish were 12 to 16 inches long. Adult walleye population estimates of 2.4 per acre were similar to the 1999 survey of 2.6 per acre.

Walleye reproduction on Cedar Lake in St. Croix County remains well above state averages. Walleye fishing in 2006 will be fast at times but the average walleye will be sub-legal.

Anglers looking for shore fishing opportunities in this area may want to check out Willow River State Park near Hudson, Mary's Park in New Richmond, Homestead County Park on Perch Lake south of Somerset, the Army Corp. of Engineers Eau Galle Recreation Area near Spring Valley, and Pine Point County Park near the Village of Eau Galle. A new fishing pier is scheduled to be installed in Glen Hills County Park near Glenwood City by mid-June.

–Marty Engel, fisheries biologist, Baldwin

La Crosse, Vernon, Crawford and Monroe counties

Recent improvements in land use, aggressive habitat restoration and a wild trout program have transformed the fishery in the four-county area from a "put and take" fishery to one with self-sustaining wild trout populations on most streams. Since 1995, stream inventory surveys have added more than 325 miles of new or upgraded water and another 50 miles will be added in 2006.

The regulation for most streams north of the La Crosse River is a 7-inch minimum size limit and a five fish bag limit. These are lower fertility brook trout streams with good numbers of 8-10 inch brook trout and some nice browns.

Most waters south of the La Crosse River have a 9-inch minimum size limit and a three fish bag limit. These are highly fertile streams with excellent numbers of brown trout and some brook trout. Both species are fast growing in these waters and several browns in the 20+ inch range and brook trout 15-18 inches are caught each year.

There are 17 "Category 5" special regulation streams in the La Crosse area, 13 of which are "artificial lures only, catch and release" streams. Most of these are small brook trout streams, the rest, brown trout waters with good trophy trout potential. There are also four streams where harvest of smaller fish is encouraged by an increase of the bag limit to 5 trout but they must be less than 12 inches. These streams are starting to provide some real quality fishing with many trout in the 12-15 inch range, good numbers of 16-19 inch fish and some real trophies in the 24+ inch category.

Although there are more than 200 miles of public access provided by easements or state ownership, the majority of good water is surrounded by private land. While anglers have access to navigable waters through road "right of ways" and other public crossings, they must remain in the stream to remain legal. An easier approach is to stop and talk to the landowner. Most just want to know who's on their land and will rarely deny access. It's also a good opportunity to develop some new relationships.

There is also some excellent warm water fishing scattered throughout the counties. The Black River has abundant smallmouth bass and walleyes and some trophy muskies. The lower La Crosse River has an excellent catfish population. A recent survey found flathead catfish up to 43 pounds and channel catfish 5 to 10 pounds. There are also smallmouth bass, walleyes and some very large northern pike. The Kickapoo and the upper La Crosse rivers are also home to some very large brown trout. Canoes or small flat bottom boats are the best way to access these rivers.

–Dave Vetrano, fisheries supervisor, La Crosse

Fisheries staffer John Raatz holds a 20-inch naturally reproduced brown trout from one of Crawford County's many Class 1 trout streams. Photo by Jordan Weeks.

Major fishing regulation changes for 2006-07

The complete "2006-2007 Guide to Wisconsin Hook and Line Fishing Regulations" is available at DNR offices and license agents. It also can be found in portable document format (pdf) on the DNR Web site, *http://www.wisconsinfishing.org*, then click on "regulations" or contact the Bureau of Fisheries Management and Habitat Protection at (608) 267-7498 for more details.

Check the regulations for changes to specific county waters. The following major rule changes take effect April 1, 2006, unless otherwise noted.

- Anglers may legally possess a non-indigenous detrimental fish for the purpose of transporting it to a DNR office for identification. An angler is restricted to one specimen and it must be immediately killed.
- Placement of setlines, set or bank poles, or any part thereof, is prohibited before the opening of the setline, set or bank pole season, and they must be removed after the season is closed.
- The bag limit for yellow perch increases to 15 in Green Bay only beginning May 20, 2006.
- The night fishing closure and hook size restrictions begin September 15 rather than October 1 each year to better coincide with the runs of migratory salmonids on tributaries to Lake Michigan and Green Bay.
- The open season for northern pike on small Lake Michigan tributaries north of U.S. Highway 10 is changing from a continuous open season to the general fishing season of the first Saturday in May to the first Sunday in March to protect northern pike during the spawn. The northern pike fishing season on the East Twin River, West Twin River, Ahnapee River and Kewaunee River will remain open all year.

–Joe Hennessy, warmwater lakes and regulations specialist, Madison

Store bought or sport caught, it doesn't matter

Track your fish consumption, choose species wisely

State health officials urge all people who eat fish more than once a week – regardless of whether it was bought at a grocery store or restaurant or caught by an angler in a lake or stream – to keep track of what they eat and select species low in mercury.

"The benefits of eating fish usually outweigh the potential risk from contaminants that may be in the fish, but recent studies underscore that people need to make sure they follow our advice for the number of meals and species they can safely eat," says Dr. Henry Anderson, chief medical officer for the Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health, Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS).

Recent surveys and studies have shown that 83 percent of all Wisconsin adults eat fish, with some people exposing themselves to unsafe amounts of mercury by eating too much of the wrong kind of fish. Panfish, young fish and light tuna have lower amounts of mercury while canned white tuna, swordfish, and game fish like musky and walleye have more.

A DHFS study of hair samples submitted by 2,031 Wisconsin residents found that 20 percent had high hair mercury levels, according to Dr. Lynda Knobeloch, the researcher who led that study. Study participants' mercury hair levels generally reflected their fish intake and men typically had higher mercury levels then women, especially if they fish.

Investigations of several cases in which people developed elevated mercury levels or had symptoms that improved after they stopped eating mercury-contaminated fish found that all people with hair mercury levels were eating too much of some types of fish, such as store-bought tuna, sea bass, or predator fish, usually walleye or northern pike caught from Wisconsin lakes. Irritability, confusion, difficulty in sleeping and balance problems were among the problems the people reported, according to Candy Schrank, a DNR toxicologist and co-author of the case report.

Wisconsin has issued fish consumption guidelines since 1978 for sport fish caught in state waters, and in more recent years has provided information from the federal government on fish purchased from stores and restaurants. These "Safe Eating Guidelines" now apply to most inland waters with the exception of 92 found to have higher mercury levels and 49 waters that warrant specific PCB advisories. The federal government and 42 other states also issue fish consumption advisories.

Mercury naturally occurring in the environment and from the burning of fossil fuels enters waters and is converted to a toxic form that's easily absorbed by fish and other aquatic organisms, and in turn, by people that eat the fish. At low levels, such mercury can harm the developing nervous system of a fetus and adults' cardiovascular and immune systems. At high levels, mercury can trigger problems including memory loss, slurred speech, lack of coordination, coma, and possibly death.

Anderson says surveys show that 78 percent of adults are aware of the need to limit fish consumption to avoid exposure to contaminants, and 20 percent are unaware. "Most adults in Wisconsin have heard about the need to limit their intake of mercury-contaminated fish, but some are apparently not following the advice or did not understand the consumption advisories apply to purchased fish as well," he says.

"There are also still adults who are unaware of the advisories. We need to do a better job of understanding who these people are and how best to reach them with consumption information so they can continue to enjoy the benefits of eating fish while reducing their exposure to contaminants."

Fish are low in saturated fat, high in protein and contain high levels of Omega-3 fatty acids, which lower the risk of heart disease and stroke, diabetes and cancer, Anderson says.

For more information on Wisconsin fish consumption advisories, go to *www.fishingwisconsin.org.*

For more information on purchased fish, go to *www.epa.gov/ost/fish/.*

–Candy Schrank, DNR fish contaminant coordinator

Consumption advice for healthy eating

Women of childbearing years, nursing mothers and all children

Wisconsin sportfish
1 meal/week: panfish
1 meal/month: gamefish and other species
Do not eat: muskellunge

Purchased fish
2 meals/week: salmon, shrimp, canned light tuna, pollock, catfish
2 meals/month: canned white tuna, tuna steaks, halibut
Do not eat: shark, swordfish, king mackerel, tilefish

Men and women of beyond childbearing age

Wisconsin sportfish
Unlimited: panfish
1 meal/week: gamefish and other species

Purchased fish
Unlimited: salmon, shrimp, canned light tuna, pollock, catfish
1 meal/week: canned white tuna, tuna steaks, halibut
2 meals/month: shark, swordfish, king mackerel, tilefish

Science Corner

DNR's fisheries program is supported by scientists in the Science Services Bureau. For the full array of research these scientists are pursuing, go to DNR's Web site, *www.dnr.wi.gov*, then search for "fish and habitat research." Here, we spotlight the work of one researcher.

Matthew G. Mitro, DNR coldwater fisheries research scientist

Age: 36

Education: Ph.D. in fish and wildlife biology and master's in statistics from Montana State University, Bozeman, Mont; master's degree in wildlife and fisheries biology from the University of Vermont, Burlington, VT; bachelor's degree in biology from Colgate University, Hamilton, N.Y.

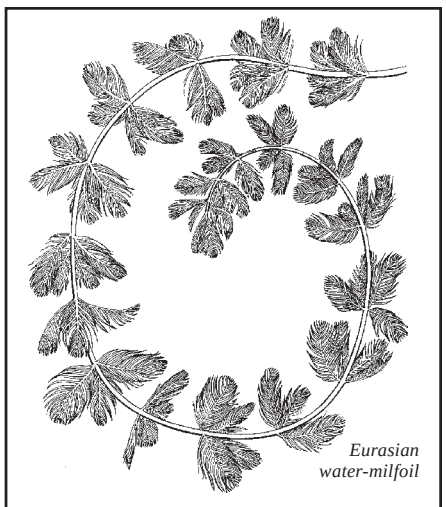
Previous jobs: Population ecologist for U.S. EPA's Atlantic Ecology Division; stock assessment biologist for the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, Wakefield, R.I.; graduate research assistant at Montana Cooperative Fishery Research Unit, Bozeman, Mont.

I'm currently:

- Studying trout populations that supply eggs for DNR's wild trout program to determine how they're affected by annual egg collection. I'm also tagging these trout to determine survival rates for trout spawning in the streams versus those brought to a hatchery to spawn, recruitment of new trout to each population, and how these populations are changing over time. The goal is to ensure a sustainable wild trout stocking program.
- Testing if trout habitat improvement without overhead cover can improve brook trout populations in Big Spring Creek and Elk Creek, two streams where brook trout coexist with brown trout. Results of this study will help guide future brook trout stream restoration projects.
- Collaborating on development of a stream classification and land-use modeling study that can be used to allocate trout stream monitoring efforts, to identify trout streams for restoration work based on the potential for success, and to evaluate how different land use or global climate change scenarios may impact trout populations in Wisconsin.

Matthew G. Mitro

- Developing population models to help manage trout populations in Wisconsin streams that could help predict how different stressors, such as habitat degradation or loss, and angler catch and release or harvest, may affect trout reproduction or growth or survival of trout in different size and age classes. Trout models would help in better understanding processes that regulate and factors that limit trout populations, and would provide a framework to rigorously evaluate trout fishing regulations and habitat management activities.



Eurasian water-milfoil

Simple steps slow invasives

Invasive species are threatening Wisconsin's lands and lakes, woods and wetlands.

Natural predators and pathogens that keep these non-native, invasive species in check in their homelands generally aren't found here, so the invaders are spreading and taking a toll on Wisconsin's environment, economy and recreation. Buckthorn, gypsy moth, purple loosestrife and Eurasian watermilfoil are among the most widely-known, but new threats are emerging, including the Emerald Ash Borer, which has infested and killed nearly 15 million ash trees in Michigan since the mid-1990s.

The good news is citizens can slow the advance or prevent invasive species from gaining a foothold.

Here are a few simple steps you can take:

- Before leaving a boat launch:
  Inspect and remove plants and animals.
  Drain or flush water from live well, bilge, motor, etc.
  Dispose of unwanted live bait in the trash. This includes worms.
  Rinse boat and equipment with hot and/or high pressure water OR
  Dry boat and equipment for five days.
- Take only the wood you need for your trip. Burn it or bring home the rest.
- Don't buy or bring any firewood from Michigan; buy firewood from local sources.
- Inspect any outdoor items moved from the eastern half of Wisconsin for gypsy moth caterpillars or egg masses. Visit *www. gypsymoth.wi.gov* for identification help.
- If you're a gardener, learn which species can be invasive and avoid using them. DNR's Web site contains lists and photos. Go to *www.dnr.wi.gov* then use the A to Z index and select "invasive species."
- Report new infestations of invasive species to your local DNR office.

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SPORT FISH RESTORATION